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*Ernest Druyer*  
1839

## LECTURES

ON

## ENGLISH POETRY,

TO THE

TIME OF MILTON.

BY STANHOPE BUSBY ESQ.

LONDON  
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WATSON

## P R E F A C E.

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It was the author's desire in the following pages to convey some idea of the merits of our earlier poets, and to direct attention to their works without entering into a formal critical analysis, which would have been too diffuse, and not sufficiently popular for a general lecture.

That such a work as the present must be imperfect the author is well aware—the subject is copious, and there is much that he has been obliged to pass over with a hasty allusion, or altogether in silence. The ballads and fugitive verses familiarized to the public in the admirable collections of Percy and Ellis, and the poetry of many anonymous authors have sufficient claims for a separate notice, which would have been appended to the present volume, did it not already exceed the limits which the author proposed, and his treatment of the subject warrants.

The quotations scattered through the lectures are not always the most striking that could have been selected; but it was necessary they should be concise, and difficult to extract specimens of equal length and greater interest. Detached passages will generally offer but a faint idea of the work in which they occur, and for that reason preference has generally been given to any little poems which, if they are not the best illustrations of their author's genius, are at least complete in themselves.

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**LECTURE ON ENGLISH POETRY BEFORE  
THE TIME OF MILTON.**



LECTURE  
ON  
ENGLISH POETRY,  
BEFORE THE  
TIME OF MILTON.

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THE review of literature in its early ages is an occupation probably as useful as it is interesting. We may thence gather considerable information of the manners and intelligence of the times, and obtain an insight into those domestic habits and popular pursuits which escape the eye or do not enter into the design of the historian. It is only when the feelings and observations of our ancestors are known, when we see the models by which their opinions were formed, or the objects that excited their admiration, that we can properly appreciate their actions ; and thus, while we obtain from history an account of public events and public characters, it is from the more

diffuse but popular records of contemporary literature that we discern those many circumstances of society that are wanting to give a proper tone and color to the picture of the period, and finish that bold sketch of which history is the grand outline.

There are perhaps few branches of literature more calculated to supply part of this information than poetry. While we occasionally meet with subjects furnished and adorned wholly by the imagination, we more often see poetic genius dwelling on realities, discoursing of the ambitions, or heightening the affections of mankind ; painting in glowing colors whatever prominently excites our hopes or fears, our desire or our hatred, yet still affording an index of common opinion, and presenting us with images of those motives and passions by which human nature is impelled. In proportion as the author is confined to subjects that fall under his actual observation, the manners and usages of real life are interwoven with, and become the principal of his theme, and the persons of his fictions are endued with the same views that influence the common mass around him ; they have the same superstitions, the same prejudices, and there is an impress of reality in the design that even the least reflective must appreciate.

It was in poetry, rude as the times in which it arose, that the early traditions of most nations were preserved. Nay, even, in the primitive world, the precepts of the

legislator were moulded into metre. The measure of verse makes it easy of remembrance, and long before either reading or writing were general accomplishments, and man was dependant on his memory, the convenience of retaining verse in the recollection rendered it popular. Neither was its influence forgotten. As it has more nerve and power than prose, so was it more calculated to make an impression on the mass of mankind ; and hence we find in the fabulous religions of the world, the language of poetry was used in their ceremonies, and their deities communicated with mortals in verse.

In the dark superstition of the Britons, the bards formed one division of the priesthood, and celebrated their gods and heroes to the music of their rude harps.\* The Goths who overrun Europe had their scalds or bards, who invoked the warlike Odin, and in lofty lyrics sang their wild and terrible legends and spirit stirring battle songs. The first poetry of an uncivilized race is always nervous and impassioned, abounding in grand but simple metaphor, and preserving a tempestuous harmony through its irregular and unequal lines. The impressions of the uneducated are strong, and their feelings soon excited by the gloomy and sublime. Familiar with the rough accidents of life, their imagination seizes upon whatever

\* Such is the power that has been ascribed to the British bards that we are told by Diodorus Siculus that "sometimes when two armies are standing in order of battle, with their swords drawn and lances extended, upon the point of engaging in a most furious conflict, the poets have stepped in between them, and by their soft and fascinating songs calmed the fury of the warriors, and prevented the bloodshed. Thus even among barbarians (he adds) rage gave way to wisdom, and Mars submitted to the Muses."

is marked, bold, and real, and their superstition assumes a stern and substantial character; they crowd the heavens and the earth with beings who still retain the violent passions of men, while their divinities speak in the tempest or hover round the field of carnage. Images of rugged grandeur and awe first fill the mind, long before it awakens to appreciate whatever is calm lovely and unexciting.

The Saxons in the fifth century brought with them into England the Runic letters and language, and it was not until after their conversion to Christianity\* that they neglected those symbols, which thenceforward they esteemed necromantic. With their old gloomy superstition they lost much of their poetic character, their minstrels sang moral rhapsodies or scriptural histories instead of their former wild and warlike fictions, and their allusions to the Scaldic fables and heroes became few and occasional. Their bards degenerated in influence and character, and were afterwards known by the name of gleemen.

The minstrels or gleemen were a peculiar class, whose province it was to wander from place to place, singing legends and receiving money and hospitality in return for their songs and tales, and for the exhibition of those feats of activity which formed part of their performance. They were at once poets, vocalists, and jugglers; and however

\* Which took place before the seventh century.

primitive their rhymes, or ordinary their feats, they afforded a welcome amusement in an age that offered little variety of pursuit, when the mind was little instructed, and the rude fiction or ruder jest excited the attention or aroused the ready mirth of a crowd of listeners..

The progress of literature among the Saxons was tardy and gradual. For some time after their invasion, when their power was established, they directed their attention to the arts of peace, but they were eventually exposed to a series of internal divisions, and to the hostile incursions of the Danes. Arms and the warlike amusements appear to have been their pleasure: the enemy was at their doors, and the sword and spear were within their hands. The spirit of minstrelsy however was not quelled, it had charms for the rude soldier, and were other evidence of its power wanting, the entrance of Alfred into the Danish camp, disguised as a harper or gleeman, would shew the influence of poetry and the popularity of its professors.

The Norman army that invaded England came accompanied by its minstrels, and amongst them the celebrated Taillefer, who encouraged the soldiers with songs of Charlemagne and Roland, and rushed, sword in hand, amidst the Saxon ranks, where he perished.

The Norman minstrels are supposed to have been descendants of the scalds, and to have been celebrated in the north of France long before the troubadours of

Provence arose with their legends and romances in the south ; but from the time of the Conquest their occupations were little different from those of the gleemen.\* It is true that the Normans introduced a more lively and romantic poetry, and had in some measure caught the spirit of the troubadours, but the verse of the period still extant consists chiefly of rhyming chronicles and scriptural paraphrases ; the minstrels had ceased to rely upon their own imagination, they had lost their sturdy superstition, and became little better than tame imitators, pouring forth long poems, the incidents of which they collected from such historical legends as fell within their reach.

The prevalence of the French language amongst the Norman nobility, and its introduction into the court, tended to bring the old Anglo-Saxon tongue into disrepute, and the policy of the conquerors threatened to exterminate it entirely. But it is as difficult to work an immediate revolution in the language as in the manners of a nation ; or (apart from national prejudices in favor of an old dialect) to teach a people a new tongue, without some extraordinary facilities for instructing them. The learned and the courtly composed either in the Norman French, or the language of romance ; and as their performances were highly esteemed, so many of them have been

\* The Norman minstrels divided the practice of their art into many branches, and distinguished its professors by different names, as "rimours, chanterres, contours, jouglours, jestours, lecours, and troubadours or trouveurs." Of these the trouveurs and contours composed the subjects they sung or related, and the jouglours and chanterres used the productions of others. The trouveurs, embellished their productions with rhyme, while the contours related their histories in prose.

preserved. But there were other poets among the people, who had no higher aim or abilities than to amuse the mass of their countrymen; and they sang their humble but national ballads in popular accents, with an occasional inspiration, which, notwithstanding their fugitive character, has rescued many of their rhymes from oblivion.

In the course of time however the Saxon and Norman languages gradually blended into one, and then was formed the basis of the English which is now spoken; although by a better acquaintance with ancient as well as with the modern literature of foreign countries, it has from time to time received additions from many sources, and attained a comprehensiveness and vigor, a power and a delicacy which it wanted at its origin, and which nothing but time and circumstance could have matured. New sentiments or more refined reasoning have suggested or required the adoption of new expressions, and poetry, as well as the more precise necessities of science and philosophy, has gradually introduced an improvement into the language of which at first it seemed scarcely susceptible; for though nervous it was rude, and though expressive yet limited.

The Crusades, arousing as they did the spirit of adventure, and the love of what was marvellous and exciting, gave rise to a flood of poetry in which the gallantry and extravagant heroism of the age appear in glowing colors. The dull and tedious rhyming chronicles

that were before popular at once gave way to more exuberant fancies. The minstrels were breathing of action, they selected monarchs and warriors for their heroes: Charlemagne and Roland, Arthur and Merlin, Godfrey and Solyman, were favorites of their muse, and even the legends of ancient mythology furnished them with subjects. All was tinged with the religious and warlike enthusiasm of the times. Their characters were as devout as valiant, and their gallantry to the fair sex almost fantastic. They were the heroes of the bower as well as of the field; and whether delivering virgins from giants or monsters, from enchanters or infidels, were always jealous of their renown, and as tender to female delicacy, as they were fearless of danger and anxious for combat. These romances were prolix, and occasionally tedious, teeming with the superstitious feeling of the age. Their authors had more fancy than learning, and would clothe the renowned of classic times with the manners, and endue them with the feelings of their own. This inconsistency is often sufficiently ridiculous, and is very apparent in the many productions of the minstrels which have been handed down to modern times. In better taste, and with more unity of purpose, we have seen their style successfully imitated and embellished by Sir Walter Scott and other poets of the present age.

The reign of chivalry, fantastic as it may have been, forms a history of itself; and however wild the spirit which gave rise to the institution, its effects were con-

siderable. It soon spread over Europe, and aroused a more generous and enlightened sentiment than had previously existed. The poetry to which it gave birth was courted throughout the more civilized countries, and in the early part of the fourteenth century aroused the sublime genius of Dante, the tender delicacy of Petrarch, and the warm imagination of Boccacio—circumstances necessary to be remembered—for it was the works of these three distinguished authors of Italy that gave a tone to the conception of Geoffrey Chaucer, the father of the English muse, the earliest of our national poets, who wove our newly formed language into the measures of verse, and rejecting the extravagances of the French romancers, wrote with a system and precision, and at the same time with a vigor that was foreign to their works.

Our earliest specimen of Saxon poetry is a fragment by Cædmon,\* a monk of Whitby, which is preserved in the works of King Alfred. The poet, who was an unlearned man, paraphrased in rude but powerful verse such part of the scripture as he had gathered from the recitation of the ecclesiastics. The venerable Bede, renowned for his learning and piety, who lived in the eighth century, composed a History of England and many other works in Latin, as was customary in the early ages when readers were few and learned, and authors looked for renown amongst the celebrated of other lands as well as their own. Alfred the Great translated Bede's History and other books

\* Cædmon lived about 670.

into Anglo-Saxon, and there are examples of poetry in that language during the ninth century full of the wild and irregular imagination which is peculiarly adapted to the unsensual yet superstitious minds of a generous but unlearned people.\*

In the time of the Normans we have Wace, who translated into French the Brut of Geoffrey of Monmouth; Layamon, a priest, who translated Wace into the popular language of the period; Robert of Gloucester, the rhyming historian of Lear, Merlin, and Arthur; Robert De Brunne, the Chronicler; Lawrence Minot, famed for his battle songs; and Langlande, the author of the Visions of Piers Plowman. Yet these were but unworthy precursors of Chaucer. Their poetry was generally vague, tedious, and obscure, their language harsh and unsettled; their fancies weak and uncertain; they had little of that sterling truth or glowing imagination which is requisite, in all ages and under all circumstances, to render verse lasting and impressive. Chaucer, when he came, rose like a superior power, to claim the desecrated temples from which poetry had fled; he was one to whose searching glance the mystery of human motive lay bare and plain, and he could appreciate the beautiful in nature and the great in man. "He has been likened to the spring, and has been called the day star of English poetry, he was a sun whom no star

\* The reader is referred to the notes at the end of the volume for a translation of a Saxon ode on a victory of King Athelstan in the year 938.

preceded. He arose upon us, like the morning, fresh and beautiful, and kept on his shining way, strong, untired, and rejoicing."

CHAUCER was born in the year 1328 ; and having graced the reigns of Edward the Third and his successor, Richard the Second, died in 1400, in his 72nd year. It is doubtful whether he was educated at the university of Oxford or Cambridge, but it appears probable that he studied at both. He afterwards visited France and the Low Countries, and on his return was entered at the Inner Temple, where we learn from an old record that "Geoffrey Chaucer was fined 2s. for beating a Franciscan Friar in Fleet-street." He was early attached to the king's son, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, by whose favor he obtained in marriage Philippa, the sister of the famous Catherine Swynford, the Duke's mistress and afterwards his wife. He enjoyed an office of trifling emolument under the patronage of Edward the Third, and made frequent tours to France and Italy, sometimes in a public character. In Italy he was introduced to Petrarch, at the marriage of Violante, daughter of Galeazzo, Duke of Milan, with the Duke of Clarence ; and it is supposed that he was also personally acquainted with Boccacio.

Our earlier poets were generally unlearned minstrels or recluse scholars, and their lays had either the rudeness of the hovel or the coldness of the convent. Chaucer, on

the other hand, rose to repute under the auspices of the courtly, and was placed in a sphere of life where he had wider and better opportunities for studying manners, and rendering his style and language pointed and refined. The fame of the Italian poets had filled Europe, the Provincial romances were still popular, the spirit of chivalry was at its height, the English and Continental courts were remarkable for their splendor and gallantry, and there was everything that could excite a lively fancy, or rouse a fervid imagination. And Chaucer neglected not these advantages, but drew largely from the rich store of his experience. He was a man of the world, and could hit off character in those happy lights which give his pictures the appearance of reality. At tournament or hostelrie, in romance or humor, in the every day world, or in scenes of his own creating, he is at home, earnest and unconstrained ; and he describes the strong passions with an artlessness that is truth itself.

The Canterbury Tales contain examples of the wide scope of his genius. From the knight to the miller, from the prioress to the wife of Bath, there is an ample range of character—his knowledge of mankind appears universal. He dazzles us with elaborate displays of Gothic magnificence ; but is equally powerful when he sketches the cottages of rustics. He is devotional, joyous, or satirical, without effort, and never ‘o'erstepping the modesty of nature.’ The Canterbury Tales were written at various periods of Chaucer's life, and were not completed until he

was somewhat advanced in years. He was indebted in a great measure for their general arrangement, and in many instances for the design of the tales themselves; but the personages of his pilgrims and the circumstances of their journey are essentially his own, and some of their stories appear to be wholly original.

Boccacio in his Decameron had imagined the assembly of ten young persons at a country house, when the plague in Florence began to abate, and every day each narrated some story for their common amusement. Chaucer collected at the Tabard Inn in Southwark a company of pilgrims about to journey to the shrine of the Martyr Becket, at Canterbury; when, to enliven the way, it was agreed that each should tell at least one tale in going and another in returning; and that he who told the best should be treated by the others with a supper on again reaching the Inn where they first assembled. It appears that the poet intended to describe their journey “and all the remenant of their pilgrimage;” but the undertaking was extensive, and more than one half the tales are wanting.

The pilgrims are persons of different rank and station. There is the knight, the millere, the reve, the coke, the sergeant of the lawe, the wif of Bathe, the frere ‘wanton and merrie,’ the sounmpnoure, the clerk of Oxenford, who rode a horse ‘lene as is a rake,’ and

Not a word spake he more than there was nede,  
And that was said in forme and reverence,  
And short and quike, and ful of high sentence;  
Souning in moral vertue was his speche,  
And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche.

the marchante, the yonge squire, the frankelaine, the doctoure, the pardonere, the shipmanne, the prioress and her attendant nonnes, our author, the monk, the yeman, the manciple, and the poor parsonne of a toun,

But riche he was of holy thought and werk.

The tales of all these persons are preserved. There were also a haberdasher, carpenter, webbe, deyer, and tapiser,

(Alle yclothed in o liver  
Of a solempne and grete fraternite.)

together with a plowman, whose tales do not appear, although some of them have been supplied by an inferior author. All these characters are described in the prologue with a truth and humor that at once carry us back to the times of the poet, and call up the beings by whom he was surrounded in real and substantial form before our eyes. They are not mere images dressed up for the occasion, and brought forward to display their inanimation, but living flesh and blood—our actual ancestors as they existed in those times, before the refinements of society had tempered their rough virtues, or subdued their natures.

will quote two characters :—that of the yeoman who accompanied the squire, a genuine picture of the sturdy ntryman equipped for an expedition ; and that of the press, a prim and courtly personage, with an affectation genteel manners and stately dignity.

A Yeman hadde he, \* \* \*  
 And he was cladde in cote and hode of grene;  
 A shefe of peacock arwes bright and kene  
 Under his belt he bare ful thriftily :  
 Wel coude he dresse his takel yemanly :  
 His arwes drouped not with fetheres lowe,  
 And in his hond he bare a mighty bowe.

A not-hed\* hadde he, with a brounne visage :  
 Of wood-craft coudet he wel alle tha usage :  
 Upon his arme he bare a gaine bracer;‡  
 And by his side a swerd and a bokele;‡  
 And on that other side a gaine daggere,  
 Harneised wel, and sharp as point of spere:  
 A Cristofre;§ on his brest of silver shene.  
 An horne he bare, the baudrik was of grene;  
 A forster was he.

Ther was also a Nonne, a Prioesse,  
 That of hire|| smiling was ful simple and coy,  
 Hire gretest oath n'as but by Seint Eloy,¶  
 And she was cleped Madam Egleniente;  
 Ful wel she sange the service devine,  
 Entuned in hire nose ful swetely ;  
 And Frenche she spake ful fayre and fetisaly,\*\*  
 After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,  
 For Frenche of Paris was to hire unknowe.

er celebrating her refined manners at table — an

\* Nut head.      + Knew.      ‡ Armour for the arms.

‡ A saint who presided over the weather, the patron of field sports.  
 || Her      ¶ Seinte Loi, i. e. Saint Louis.      \*\* Neatly.

accomplishment of much moment by the by in those days, when the banquets of our ancestors had more materielle and less elegance than the feasts of modern times—we are next told of the sentimentality of her disposition, her dress and personal appearance.

But for to spoken of hire conscience,  
 She was so charitable and so pitous,  
 She wolde wepe if that she saw a mous  
 Caughte in a trappe, if it were ded or bledde.  
 Of smale houndes hadde she, that she fedde  
 With rosted flesh, and milke, and wastel brede,  
 But sore wept she if on of hem were dede,  
 Or if men smote it with a yerde\* smert:  
 And all was conscience, and tendre herte.

Full semely hire wimple ypinched was,  
 Hire nose tretis,+ hire eyen grey as glas ;  
 Hire mouth full smale, and therto soft and red ;  
 But sikerly† she hadde a fayre forehed ;  
 It was almost a spanne brode I trowe,  
 For hardily she was not undergowe.

Ful fetise was hire cloke, as I was ware.  
 Of smale corall about hire arm she bare  
 A pair of bedes gaudea all with grene,  
 And thereon heng a broche of gold ful shene,  
 On whiche was first ywritten a crouned 'A,'  
 And after, 'Amor vincit omnia.'

Another Nonne also with hire had she  
 That was hire chapelleine, and Preestes thre.

The knight's tale, § one of the best sustained and most

\* Stick.    + Long and well proportioned.    † In soothe.

‡ Dryden's Palamon and Arcite, the glorious paraphrase of this tale, is familiar to every one. Warton calls it "the most animated and harmonious piece of versification in the English language."

lofty in action and gorgeous in description, appears to have been imitated from Boccacio's *Theseid*; but the groundwork of some of the descriptions may be found in the *Thebaid* of Statius. The squire's tale is a mixture of Arabian fiction and Gothic chivalry. The franklein's is founded on the miracles of natural magic. The clerk of Oxenford tells the story of Patient Grisilde, premising that he learnt it from Petrarch, at Padua.\*

The tales narrated by the nonne's preeste,† the merchant,‡ and the wife of Bath, have been modernised by Dryden and Pope; but they are surpassed in breadth and humor by the stories of the miller and the reve, which however have a grossness of plot offensive to modern taste. The sounmpnour presents us with a lively satire on the tricks and impositions of the mendicant friars; and Chaucer, in his own person, with great gravity pours forth the mock heroic Rime of Sire Thopas.

The Canterbury Tales were printed by William Caxton, the first English printer, about the year 1476, and again in 1491; and by Pynson in 1493 and 1526;

\* I wol you tell a Tale which that I  
Learned at Padowe of a worthy clerk,  
As preveyd by his wordes and his werk:  
He is now ded and nailed in his cheste,  
I pray to God so yeve his soule reste.  
Fraunceis Petrark, the Laureat poete,  
Highte thise clerk, whos rhetorike swete  
Enlumined all Itaille of poetrie.

*Prologue to the Clerk's Tale.*

But the tale, which is Boccacio's, is the last in the *Decameron*. Petrarch translated it into Latin.

† See Dryden's *Fables*, the *Cock* and the *Fox*.

‡ See Pope's *January* and *May*.

other of Chaucer's poems were republished by Wynken de Worde; and the standard edition of his works was printed by Godfray in 1532, and dedicated to Henry the Eighth—a sure proof, when we consider the few books that issued from the press in the early days of typography, that the merit of the author was well appreciated, and that writings which had passed through so many editions must have been popularly read, and as generally enjoyed.

There are many other works of Chaucer. Among the best are, a Translation into English of the Romance of the Rose, originally composed in French by William of Lorris and John of Meun—the tale of Troilus and Cresseide—several legends from classical history—the House of Fame imitated by Pope—and the fable of the Flower and the Leaf, by Dryden—together with two poems called his Dreams: the one composed on the marriage,\* and the other on the death of Blanche, the Countess of John of Gaunt.

Chaucer had great powers of language and imagination at his command. Like Shakspeare, he was inspired by the humorous as well as the tragic muse, and caught and forcibly depicted the outlines of character. His persons are well grouped; they appear naturally assembled, and in their proper places. He has a propriety of sentiment,

\* See note at the end of the volume.

and occasionally a gorgeousness of description. He mixes the things of his own with those of classic times, and the effect, though historically untrue, is generally striking and grand. With him the court of Theseus is, like the court of chivalry, peopled with knights and enlivened by the carousals and combats of his own time. His tales are well, but often inartificially told, the mechanism of the poet at times is ill concealed, and he is frequently prolix; but he had to encounter all the difficulties of treading in an unbeatened path, and tuning into music a language harsh and sterile. That his humor is often licentious and coarse was the fault of the age rather than of the poet; it is just the humor in which the persons into whose mouths he puts it would indulge—characters still to be found in the refinement of the present day, whose wit consists in rude allusions or boisterous mirth. His knights and maidens do not offend against delicacy, but the miller or the wife of Bath derive their merriment from the most obvious sources. Some of Chaucer's admirers have declared him to be second only to Shakspeare in power and originality; he is like water to the thirsty, refreshing and unfevering. He presents us with a true unadulterated transcript of the manners, feelings, and intelligence of his age. His models were few and simple; scorning mere imitation, he trusted to himself, and whenever he borrowed a design, he made it his own by his peculiar coloring. In the age of exaggeration his subjects preserve their due tone and proportion. His mistress was nature, and he was content

with her. He forgot neither her vices nor her virtues, her graces nor her deformities ; and as he observed them he stamped them down in their own tints, and crowded the canvass of his poetry with that variety of character, yet unity of design, which a great master is alone able either to conceive or perfect.\*

Contemporary with Chaucer was his friend, the 'moral,' the 'gentle' GOWER, who in early life composed largely in French and Latin, and in his later years wrote an English poem in eight books entitled *Confessio Amantis*, which is a dialogue between a lover and his confessor, who is a priest of Venus. The work is wanting in unity, proportion of detail, and in that masculine vigor and originality which distinguish the productions of Chaucer. Considering the times in which he lived, Gower was a man of great attainments and lively accomplishments, but his imagination was cold and unproductive. He reasons where he should paint, he gives a moral instead of an image, he is copious where he should be impassioned and concise, while, in his eagerness for illustration, he hurries off to legends that have little connection with his subject ; but his creations are delicate though faint, and his verse fluent though diffuse. He indulges in all those absurdities into which the early writers were seduced by their indiscriminate taste for classical and romantic fables ; and by a strange want of judgment has made the

\* I would refer such of my readers as are anxious to pursue the subject to Warton's History of English poetry, Tyrwhitt's learned edition of Chaucer's Works, and the ingenious but speculative life of the poet by Godwin.

confessor of his poem a good Catholic as well as minister of the laughing eyed goddess of antiquity, and an instructor at least as learned in his breviary as in Ovid.

The revival of learning threw open the rich stores of classical literature to the studious; and they were too absorbed in contemplating the treasures of antiquity, and fathoming the subtle discussions of the old philosophers, to cultivate the bold yet simple strains of national poetry. Humbler minstrels strove for the wreaths of the muses, and in their unpolished ballads and fugitive verses, full of strong and marked character and expression, spoke plainly of the popular feelings and common tastes of the period. Soon afterwards the invention of printing multiplied the ancient manuscripts, and with them were sent to the world the legends\* of monks and controversies of divines, until the spirit of metaphysical enquiry became general, and damped for a while the more creative genius of imagination.

But adverse to poetry as this new turn of study may have been, the troubles of the times were far more fatal to its success. Amidst the turbulence and fever of the civil wars the young spirit of intelligence struggled with a feeble power, and required the peace and reflection of after years to strengthen into maturity. It would seem that literature and the fine arts are among the bright

\* See note at the end of the volume.

influences which mark the happiness and prosperity of a nation : for like delicate flames they have flickered and smouldered in the tempests of internal discord, and brightened with renewed beauty and animation in the ensuing calm of public security.

After Chaucer there is scarcely a name worthy of remembrance till the reign of Henry the Eighth. There lived however about 1420 OCCLEVE, a lawyer, who is supposed to have been Chaucer's scholar ;\* LYDGATE, a Benedictine monk, but not merely the poet of the monastery—at disguisings, may games, masks, mummings, and processions of pageants, he was consulted in the ceremonies and wrote the verse. There were JAMES THE FIRST of Scotland (who sang the sorrows of his captivity at Windsor, and his romantic affection for the fair Lady Jane Beaufort) ; HENRYSON, the schoolmaster, DUNBAR, and SIR DAVID LYNDsay, all minstrels of the north ;—BARCLAY, and his rival, SKELTON, who was little inspired by the muses, but had the courage to declaim against Wolsey, and was only protected by the sanctuary from the vengeance of the cardinal ; GAWIN DOUGLAS, a quaint but spirited translator; LORD ROCHFORD, the brother of Anna Boleyn ; SIR FRANCIS BRYAN, and LORD VAUX.

HENRY HOWARD, the Earl of Surrey, whose execution was one of the last crimes of Henry the Eighth's reign, is

\* Chaucer was Occleve's model rather than master. 2 Warton, 353.

highly renowned for his accomplishments, learning, and valor, as well as his romantic life and melancholy fate. He signalized himself not only at tilt and tournament, but on the battle field ; and celebrated the beauty of the Lady Geraldine with the gallantry, while he defended it with the courage of a knight errant. His sonnets are polished and expressive, wanting in power, yet free from that conceit which gives an air of affectation to the works of his friend, WYATT. Both were zealous imitators of the Italian writers, but Surrey had the better discrimination and finer vein of poetry. He was the first English composer of sustained blank verse, and this, in a translation of the *Æneid* of Virgil, he has employed with a force and grandeur worthy of later times. His description and praise of his love Geraldine, although often quoted, is too full of personal interest to be passed over in silence :—

From Tuscane came my Ladies worthy race,  
Faire Florence was sometime her auncient seate :  
The Western Yle whose pleasant shore doth face  
Wild Cambers clif's, did geve her lyuely heate :  
Fostered she was with milke of Irishe brest :  
Her sire, an erle, her dame, of princes blood ;  
From tender yeres, in Britaine she doth rest,  
With kinges childe, where she tasteth costly foode,  
Honson did first present her to myne yien :  
Bright is her hewe, and Geraldine she hight,  
Hampton me taught, to wishe her first for myne,  
And Windsor, alas, doth chase me from her sight.  
Her beauty of kinde, her vertue from above,  
Happy is he, that can obtain her love.

The following is a favorable specimen of Wyatt :

Venemous thornes that are so sharpe and keme,  
Beare flowers we see, full fresh and fayre of hue,  
Poyson is also put in medicinie,  
And unto man his health doth oft renue,  
The fyre that all things eke consumeth clene,  
May hurt and heale: then if that this be true,  
I trust some time my harm may be my health,  
Sins every woe is joyned with some wealth.

The spirit of literature seemed for a time prostrated during the turbulent reign of Queen Mary, when a gloom fell alike over the humanity and the institutions of our country. The Mirrour for Magistrates however appeared at this period, and for a long time obtained a popularity which the novelty of its design and merit of its execution fully deserved. This bold and extensive poem was conceived by Thomas Sackville, the first Lord Buckhurst, and Earl of Dorset. He had purposed that all the illustrious but unfortunate characters from the Conquest to the end of the fourteenth century should pass in review before the author, who descends, like Dante, into the infernal regions, conducted by Sorrow. But Sackville only lived to complete the prefatory poem, which he calls the Induction, and the solitary legend of Stafford, Duke of Buckingham, by far the best and most eloquent part of the work, which was afterwards published with the additions of Baldwyn, Ferrers, Churchyard, Fayer, and some other authors. Sackville possessed to a certain degree that wonderful power of personification, of giving form and shape to the passions, thoughts, and affections, and representing under the guise of fabled beings the

vices and deformities of our nature, in which Spenser was afterwards unrivalled ; and the curious have carefully traced the influence of the former poet upon the loftier and nobler conceptions of the latter. His personification of war, although not the most minute in detail, is lofty and imposing.

Lastly stooode Warre in glitteryng armes yclad,  
 With visage grym, sterne lookes, and blackely hewed:  
 In his right hand a naked sworde he had,  
 That to the hiltes was al with bloud embrewed;  
 And in his left (that kinges and kingdomes rewed)  
 Famine and fyer he held, and therewythall  
 He razed townes, and threwe downe towers and all.

Cities he sakt, and realmes that whilom flowered,  
 In honour, glory, and rule above the best,  
 He overwhelmde, and all theyr fame devoured,  
 Consumed, destroyed, wasted, and never ceast,  
 Tyll he theyr wealth, theyr name, and all opprest.  
 His face forehewed with woundes, and by his side  
 There hunge his terge with gashes depe and wyde.

Sackville in early life, while a student at the Inner Temple, composed, in conjunction with Norton (a fellow laborer of Sternhold and Hopkins) a tragedy called *Ferrex and Pollex*, which is supposed to have been the first English tragedy. It is written in elevated blank verse, the dialogue is sustained, and the characters and action appropriate. It was acted before Queen Elizabeth at Whitehall in 1561, by the students of the Inner Temple.

The English in remote times had their scenic representations, adapted to the circumstance of the age, and primitive as were the habits of the people. These at first consisted of certain passages of scripture, and were called Miracle Plays; they were acted in churches, and the characters chiefly sustained by the priesthood. They were, according to the wife of Bath's prologue in the Canterbury Tales, exhibited during the season of Lent,\* and sometimes a sequel of scripture histories was carried on for several days. Beelzebub and his host of imps were constantly exposed to the rebukes and blows of the more saintly characters, and by their cries and buffooneries enlivened a performance, that would otherwise have been sufficiently monotonous. The transcript of one of these plays, the well known mystery called Corpus Christi, or the Coventry Play, is yet in existence, and is a valuable specimen of the compositions in which our ancestors delighted. There were also secular plays of great antiquity performed by strolling jestours, which were discountenanced by the religious orders, and were of the most rude and disconnected composition. When the Mysteries ceased to be performed, the Moral Plays usurped their place. They chiefly consisted of moral reasoning, and their characters were allegorical, such

\* Myn husband was at London *all that Lent,*

\* Therfore made I my visitations  
To vigilies and to processions,  
To preachings eke, and to thise pilgrimages,  
*To playes of Miracles, and mariages.*

CHAUCER.

Good Doctrine, Charity, Faith, Prudence, Discretion, or Death, their discourses being of a serious cast; but the province of making the spectators merry descended from the Devil in the Mystery to the Vice or Iniquity\* of the Morality, who usually personified some bad quality, as pride, lust, or any other evil propensity.† Comedy, it is true, had not been wholly unknown—we meet with some instances of it in the reign of Henry the Eighth and his successor; but it was sadly deficient in plot, and enlivened by wit of the most degenerate species. There had also from early time been the Ludi, or Court Plays, exhibited at court during the Christmas holidays. But they consisted of pageants, mummeries, and disguisings, gorgeous and magnificent indeed, with their crowds of characters, the glitter and variety of their robes, the quaint and grotesque personifications of their actors, their devices and their hilarity, but presenting rather an exhibition than a sustained performance.

It was in the reign of Elizabeth that the drama, in its first infancy, rose to its fullest might and glory; it sprung into existence, like Venus from the waste of waters, in all its power and proportion. It had not been nurtured with

\* In allusion to the character, Shakspeare makes the Duke of Gloucester say :

Thus, like the formal vice, Iniquity,  
I moralize two meanings in one word.

*Richard the Third, Act 3, Scene 1.*

And Ben Johnson has these lines :

But the old Vice  
Acts old Iniquity, and in the fit  
Of mimicry, gets th' opinion of a wit.

† See Strutt's *Sports and Pastimes of the People of England*.

careful and difficult study, and matured through a long childhood; but with scarcely a day's existence it had the strength of centuries. It poured into its rich treasury the highest genius and the profoundest thought, it embodied the boldest imagination with the most accurate observation. It held in its huge embrace whatever was great in poetry, in philosophy, and in truth; and, excepting that, were the whole imaginative literature of our language swept away, we might still look back with pride, and boast the possession of such authors as Shakspeare, Ben Johnson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Marlowe, Webster, Shirley, Massinger, and Ford, all of whom adorned the reigns of Elizabeth and her successors, the Stuarts, and were sufficient for the fame of a literary nation.

I have made this short digression because the best poetry of the age we are now entering upon is contained in the dramatic form, and it has been a custom (convenient for my present limits) to consider the drama as a distinct branch of literature. To have passed it wholly in silence would have appeared strange, in speaking of those celebrated in its annals; and with this brief allusion to its rise, I will pass to the consideration of our more immediate subject, without again recurring to the theatrical excellence of the period, which I hope will be borne in mind by my readers.

After Lord Buckhurst followed CHURCHYARD, and EDWARDS, whose works have not retained much popu-

larity, although those of the former have been reprinted ; **LILLY**, who introduced the fantastic style called Euphuism, and **GASCOYNE**, who divided his performances into weeds, flowers, herbs, &c. and was one of the early writers of narrative blank verse.

**CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE** is chiefly celebrated as a dramatic poet, but he translated Coluthus' Rape of Helen, and Museus' Hero and Leander, and has left us some musical and unaffected songs which are still popular.

**SIR PHILIP SYDNEY**, who, for his accomplishments and the similarity of their positions, has been compared to Surrey, was at once a hero, a politician, and a poet. Refined in his manners, chivalrous in his sentiments, and generous in his disposition, he was a proud ornament to the court and the age in which he lived ; and the anecdote of his fate at the battle of Zutphen, when, being mortally wounded, he commanded the cup of water brought for his relief to be given to a dying soldier who eyed it wistfully, will be remembered as one of those beautiful traits of humanity, which redeem our nature from its taints of dross and passion, and rise, like temples, at which men of all climes and ages, the sinner and the saint, alike bow down and do homage. Sir Philip Sydney's most popular production is a romance entitled Arcadia ; but his poems, though infected with a conceit of thought and expression common to the period, have much quiet beauty, shewing amidst all their faults the refined imagination and delicate

feelings of the author, and perhaps doubly interesting because they flowed from the pen of one so celebrated in the history of his country, and renowned for the most engaging virtues of human nature.

SPENSER possessed in an exalted degree a boundless and creative fancy. He held the golden keys of romance, and at his bidding visions crowded with life and beauty streamed upon the world. Nature teemed with a new existence, with new features and new forms. Scenes aerialized with the most delicate tints stretched far and wide; all was sunny and spiritual. Enchantment yielded her wonders and her glowing superstitions, Imagination breathed over them the breath of life, and the result was one of the most exquisite and delightful poems that fancy ever conceived or genius realized. He supposes the Faery Queen presiding at her annual court, which lasted in splendor and festivity for twelve days. Every day some suppliant is presented at her throne; she listens to the prayers of all, and commands twelve knights (each of whom personifies some exalted virtue) to espouse the cause and redress the grievances of the mourners. Prince Arthur representing Magnificence in pursuit of Glory, is by turns the counsellor and ally of these embodied phantoms of chivalry, and was intended to represent a brave knight perfected in the twelve moral virtues. The whole allegory celebrates the triumph of good principles over the various temptations of sense and dangers of worldly dissipation. It was originally contained in

twelve books, but of these six and part of the seventh only are extant, and each book is divided into twelve cantos. The first book contains the legend of the Knight of the Red Cross, or Holiness ; the others the several legends of Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice, Courtesy, and a fragment of that of Constancy. Each of these knightly virtues is exposed to the machinations of the vices most interested in its overthrow, and these vices are personified with an ingenuity at once marvellous and precise. The spirit of knight errantry runs through the whole poem. All is chivalrous and adventurous ; and notwithstanding the difficulty of the design, the interest is generally lively, and the mind is too fascinated by the variety of images and change of character thronging before it in rapid succession, to be palled by the length or satiated by the subject. The great strength of the poem lies in the legends of Holiness, Temperance, and Chastity ; and it is questioned, from the occasional want of spirit in some of the succeeding books, whether Spenser's fame has suffered by the loss of part of his manuscript. His versification is elegant, sustained, and frequently lofty ; musically harmonious and simple, and written in the stanza which is now called by the poet's name, and has been adopted in later times with great success by Beattie and Byron. The language of Spenser is less modern than that of some of his contemporaries or immediate followers ; a circumstance that may perhaps be attributed to the nature of his subject, which the quaintness and antiquity of his expressions serve rather

to embellish. As a specimen of the power of personification and description I will quote his picture of the House of Sleep :

He making speedy way through spersed ayre,  
 And through the world of waters wide and deepe,  
 To Morpheus' house doth hastily repaire.  
 Amid the bowels of the earth full steepe,  
 And low, where dawning day doth never peepe,  
 His dwelling is, there Tethys his wet bed  
 Doth ever wash, and Cynthia still doth steepe,  
 In silver deaw, his ever-drouping hed,  
 Whiles sad Night over him her mantle black doth spred.

Whose double gates he findeth locked fast,  
 The one fayre fram'd of burnisht yvory,  
 The other all with silver overcast;  
 And wakeful dogges before them farre doe lye,  
 Watching to banish Care their enimy,  
 Who oft is wont to trouble gentle sleepe.  
 By them the sprite doth passe in quietly,  
 And unto Morpheus comes, whom drowned deepe  
 In drowsie fit he findes ; of nothing he takes keepe.

And more to lulle him in his slumber soft,  
 A trickling streme from high rock tumbling downe,  
 And ever-drizling raine upon the loft,  
 Mixt with a murmuring wind, much like the sowne  
 Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swowne.  
 No other noyse, nor peoples troublous cryes,  
 As still are wont t' annoy the walled towne,  
 Might there be heard ; but careless Quiet lyes  
 Wrapt in eternal silence farre from enimyees.

The Faery Queen, as an allegorical poem, is without equal in our language. It transports us from the every day world to realms of undimmed sunshine or unbroken

gloom, inhabited by beings whose minds, like the features of ordinary mortals, take their complexion from the atmosphere by which they are surrounded—where every scene is a harmony, and every character a sentiment. We look, as through the glass of the magician, upon a wide prospect of hill, streamlet, and woodland, amidst which rise castle and palace, temple and bower, swimming in excess of light like a summer sea-shore ; while here and there the expanse is chequered by the purple and undefined shadow of a ruin, or the cold darkness of a cavern. It is here that enchanters breathe their incantations, where the spell is muttered and the mystery performed, where the knight and the maiden are encompassed by wiles and defended by talismans, until the gallantry of the one and the virtue of the other triumph over every fascination in which the genii of evil have striven to entangle them.

The other most popular works of Spenser are the Shepherd's Calendar, the Ruins of Time, and several beautiful sonnets. His life was one of reverses ; the morning and sunset of his days were overcast with clouds, and some of his sweetest and most touching poetry is that of his sorrows and lamentings. He possessed susceptible feelings and tender regards, and these threw a warmth and reality over the most creative of his fancies, and rendered his fairy land something more than a beautiful but cold abstraction.

The gallant yet unfortunate SIR WALTER RALEIGH

was a worshipper of the Muses as well as of Mars ; but whatever interest attaches to his poetry must chiefly be derived from our historical knowledge of his character, and the associations it is calculated to arouse. Stilted expressions and exaggerated similes were beginning for a time to engage popularity, and not only Raleigh, but other poets of his age, adopted a style which (now that the fashion of it has passed away) excites little interest and less admiration.

JOSHUA SILVESTER, the translator of Du Bartas' Divine Weeks and Works, acquired in his day a popularity which has not triumphantly stood the test of time. His puritanical principles and the occasional excellence of his productions are supposed to have afterwards recommended them to Milton; and some have traced to their influence the first conception of Paradise Lost.\* Contemporary with Silvester were WEBSTER, DEKKAR, BEN JOHNSON, SIR JOHN DAVIS, DRAYTON, SOUTHWELL, and the contributors to England's Helicon, GREEN, BRITTON, BAR, YOUNG, and others.

In this age lived SHAKSPEARE, the greatest of our dramatists, the writer also of the most nervous sonnets in our language. They have a consolidation of thought, a

\* It is difficult to trace every peculiar influence on the mind of an author, but Milton must have received little inspiration either from Du Bartas or Silvester—He was from nobler sources!

sterling and deep imagination, a terseness yet comprehensiveness of expression unrivalled, almost unattainable. Spenser individualized and abstracted the passions, and produced spiritual characters, Shakspeare massed and blended them, and created living and human beings ; the one rendered the most real things fanciful and ideal, the other gave life and substance to the most imaginative. The one was delicate, aerial, and precise, the other glowing, powerful, and impressive. The mistiness of Romance hangs like a vapor over the creations of the one, harmonizing their tints, and softening down their most fantastic forms ; the productions of the other stand out in the bold and massive characters and distinct colors of nature—thoughts, sensations, affections and passions are not weakened by the refinements of a metaphysical speculation, but burst into poetry in all their freshness and proportion, warm as the mind that conceived them, and genuine as the nature from which they sprang. Spenser was the Claude of poetry, Shakspeare was an Angelo or a Raphael. His Rape of Lucrece and Venus and Adonis, inferior only to his nobler and better works, are full of fine imagination and glowing language. They were the compositions of his early manhood, and were lit with the dawnings of that genius which brightened and immortalized his dramatic works.

The sonnet is perhaps the most difficult style of poetical composition. Being restricted to the exact number of fourteen lines, there is to epitomize into that

narrow compass a complete and dignified image or reflection, every part and expression of which should preserve its due proportion. If the composition be not spiritedly sustained, the whole stanza appears languid and unpleasing; and if it be attempted to crowd too much into the poem, it consequently becomes obscure and confused. To the writers of sonnets great poetic judgment, a delicate power of balancing words and concentrating ideas are indispensable; and these properties the mind of Shakspeare instinctively possessed. An epithet from his pen is often sufficient to form a picture. He has no redundancy of expletives, no rank luxuriance of words, but his images seem thrown off in the fervor of the moment, neither dilated nor distorted, following each other in rapid and continuous succession, yet each separate and complete. He surmounted the complexity of metre and the mechanical difficulties of verse with a master hand, and gave a splendor and variety to the sonnet, unknown in our language before his time; for most of the earlier poets wanted sufficient skill to draw out its true brilliancy from that gem of verse which the Italians had wrought to its highest polish. To his absent mistress he sings,

From you have I been absent in the spring,  
When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,  
Hath put a spirit of youth in every thing;  
That heavy Saturn laugh'd and leap'd with him.  
Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell  
Of different flowers in odour and in hue,  
Could make me any summer's story tell,  
Or from their proud lap pluck them where they grew.

Nor did I wonder at the lilies white,  
 Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose ;  
 They were but sweet, but figures of delight,  
 Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.  
 Yet seem'd it winter still, and, you away,  
 As with your shadow I with these did play.

*Sonnet 98.*

contrast the power and imagery of this, with the playful tenderness of the following :

Those lips that Love's own hand did make,  
 Breath'd forth the sound that said, *I hate*,  
 To me that languish'd for her sake ;  
 But when she saw my woeful state,  
 Straight in her heart did mercy come,  
 Chiding that tongue, that ever sweet  
 Was us'd in giving gentle doom ;  
 And taught it thus a-new to greet :  
*I hate* she alter'd with an end,  
 That follow'd it as gentle day  
 Doth follow night, who like a fiend  
 From heaven to hell is flown away.  
*I hate*, from hate away she threw,  
 And sav'd my life, saying—not you.

*Sonnet 145.*

SIR JOHN DAVIES composed a poem on the Immortality of the soul, the Hymns of Astrea in acrostic verse, dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, and Orchestra, or a Poem on Dancing—the first is not wanting in philosophical views or lively fancy, nor the others in conceit. His epitaph at St. Martin's-in-the-Fields tells us that “ he was a man of fine abilities and uncommon eloquence, and a most excellent writer both in prose and verse. He

tempered the severity of the lawyer with the politeness and learning of the gentleman ; he was a faithful advocate, an impartial judge, and equally remarkable for a love of sincere piety, and a contempt of anxious superstition."

JOSEPH HALL, successively Bishop of Exeter and Norwich, was the first successful satirist in our language. His verses are flowing and harmonious, and have something of that regularity of metre which was introduced in the time of Dryden. He has hit off with a humorous fidelity the vices of the upstart debauchee and the spendthrift heir, and has painted with a lively pencil some of the prevailing follies of his time. There is an allusion, in the third Satire of his fourth book, to the eager desire for wealth that turned so many of his countrymen into alchymists, or led them to the golden regions of the new world.

Vent'rous Fortunio his farm hath sold,  
And gads to Guiane land to fish for gold,  
Meeting perhaps, if Orenoque deny,  
Some straggling pinnace of Polonian rye :  
Then comes home floating with a silken sail,  
That Severne shaketh with his cannon peal ;  
Wiser Raymundus, in his closet pent,  
Laughs at such danger and adventurement,  
When half his lands are spent in golden smoke,  
And now his second hopeful glasse is broke.  
But yet if haply his third fornace hold,  
Devoteth all his pots and pans to gold.

DONNE had greater energy than Hall, but far less

power of versification ; he was abstruse, and often obscure, but occasionally powerful. His lines are faulty and inharmonious, and stand the trial of the finger better than that of the ear.\* "He affects," says Dryden, "the metaphysics, not only in his satires, but in his amorous verses, where nature only should reign, and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with speculations of philosophy, where he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softness of love."

The chief poetical work of DANIEL, who succeeded Spenser as poet laureat to Queen Elizabeth in 1599, is entitled the History of the Civil Wars, written in the octave stanza.† He was unfortunate in his subject rather than his skill. A poetical chronicle, however diversified and sustained, must often be languid and tedious, and the heroes of York and Lancaster are perhaps better qualified for the records of historic prose, than those of heroic verse. There is however a dignity and spirit in Daniel that must always rescue his works from neglect, and a purity and happiness of language superior to many of his contemporaries. His Musophilus, or defence of Learning, is eloquent and judicious, and his sonnets and minor compositions, though often tinctured with the conceit of the period, are not deficient

\* So says Dr. Johnson of the metaphysical poets of the period, generally ; but, however injudicious so sweeping a remark may be, there are not many readers who will disagree in its application to Donne.

† The *ottava rima* of the Italians, the same stanza as that of Beppo and Don Juan.

in excellence. There is a fine poetic gloom in his sonnet:

If this be love—to draw a weary breath,  
 Paint on floods, till the shore cry to th' air:  
 With downward looks, still reading on the earth  
 These sad memorials of my love's despair.  
 If this be love—to war against my soul,  
 Lie down to wail, rise up to sigh and grieve;  
 The never-resting stone of care to roll;  
 Still to complain my griefs, while none relieve.  
 If this be love—to clothe me with dark thoughts,  
 Haunting untrodden paths, to wail apart;  
 My pleasures, horror; music, tragic notes;  
 Tears in mine eyes, and sorrow at my heart.  
 If this be love—to live a living death;  
 Then do I love, and draw this weary breath.

BEN JONSON, the dramatist, has left us a collection of miscellaneous verses called Forests and Underwoods, and several larger poems. They are distinguished by an occasional tenderness and voluptuous dignity, a facility of rhyme, a manliness of thought, and a turn of mind running into epigram. His epigram on the union of the English and Scottish crowns is a specimen of the highest order of that species of composition :

When was a contract better driven by fate,  
 Or celebrated with more truth of state?  
 The world the temple was; the priest, a king;  
 The spoused pair, two realms; the sea, the ring.

The song of Night, in his Masque of the Vision of Delight breathes the very soul of music and fancy :

Break, Phant'sie, from thy cave of cloud,  
 And spread thy purple wings;  
 Now all thy figures are allow'd,  
 And various shape of things.  
 Create of airy forms a stream,  
 It must have blood, and nought of phlegm;  
 And though it be a waking dream,

## CHOEUS.

Yet let it like an odour rise  
 To all the senses here;  
 And fall like sleep upon their eyes,  
 Or music in their ear.

DRAYTON was a voluminous, yet national poet. He composed the Battle of Agincourt, the Baron's Wars, and England's Heroic Epistles. His chief work, the Poly-olbion is a description of our island, and full of antiquarian detail and allegorical personifications. He paints battle or hunting scenes, local sports or customs, and introduces historical characters and events into his poem, which is written in Alexandrine lines, and divided into thirty parts or songs. If he is often spirited and fluent, he is as often tame and monotonous. At times he presents us with an animated and highly colored picture, and again his descriptions degenerate to the level of a traveller's guide or a poetical book of roads. Drayton, if he wanted a very deep imagination, had an harmonious ear, and has left us many tripping and graceful lyrics. His Cryer is not of a very high order of poetry, but it is lively and spirited.

Good folk, for gold or hire,  
 But help me to a cryer;  
 For my poor heart is run astray  
 After two eyes, that passed this way.  
 O yes, o yes, o yes,  
 If there be any man,  
 In town or country, can  
 Bring me my heart again,  
 I'll please him for his pain;  
 And by these marks I will you shew,  
 That only I this heart do owe.  
 It is a wounded heart,  
 Wherein yet sticks the dart,  
 Ev'ry piece sore hurt throughout it,  
 Faith, and troth, writ round about it:  
 It was a tame heart, and a dear,  
 And never us'd to roam;  
 But having got this haunt, I fear  
 'Twill hardly stay at home.  
 For God's sake, walking by the way,  
 If you my heart do see,  
 Either impound it for a stray,  
 Or send it back to me.

PHINEAS FLETCHER, the author of the *Purple Island*, has been compared by his admirers to Spenser, but he fell very far short of his model in power of imagery and grandeur of design. He was however read and admired by Milton, and complimented by Quarles; but his writings are not regarded in the present day with the favor lavished on them by the author's contemporaries.

QUARLES, the puritan, wrote with much nerve and intensity, but with the gloom and spirit of his sect. His verses were popular amongst those who looked with

distrust on the wit and licence of the court poets of the age, and were read with fervor and applauded with zeal. Afterwards, when a more polished versification was successfully cultivated, and poetry was written with greater system and design, the ruggedness of Quarles' compositions caused them to fall into disrepute; but they have survived this temporary neglect, and his imagination and power are still appreciated.

There are many lyrical pieces of HERRICK's of great beauty, but his flowers were hid amidst a wilderness of weeds. His Ode to Blossoms is quaint, tender, and unaffected:

Fair pledges of a fruitful tree,  
Why do ye fade so fast?  
Your date is not so past;  
But you may stay yet here awhile,  
To blush and gently smile,  
And go at last.

What, were ye born to be  
An hour or half's delight,  
And so to bid good night?  
'Tis pity Nature brought ye forth,  
Merely to shew your worth,  
And lose you quite.

But your lovely leaves, where we  
May read how soon things have  
Their end, though ne'er so brave:  
And after they have shown their pride  
Like you, awhile, they glide  
Into the grave.

WITHERS' writings present a mass of wire-drawn lines, redeemed by an occasional burst of inspiration, a sensibility, and poetical dreaminess, that tended somewhat to sustain an elegant but languid versification, and a frequent poverty of idea.

BROWNE, the author of Britannia's Pastorals, cultivated with moderate success a style of composition that has never arrived at perfection in England. Whether it be that there is a want of sentiment in the lower classes of our countrymen, or an uncongenial coldness in our climate, certain it is that pastoral verse has never attained a position in our poetry. In the drama (as for instance in the Gentle Shepherd) and also in the Songs and Tales of Burns, and other writers, rural life has been invested with poetic interest; but the Eclogues of Browne, Phillips, and Pope are little read and less admired. The real truth is, that the state of society they represent is too primitively romantic to appear probable; while their language and sentiments seem much more like those of fine gentlemen and ladies playing shepherds and shepherdesses, than the rude but bold thoughts and words of rustic minstrels, whose feelings are inartificial, and whose affections bound rather to material objects than fanciful imagery.

GILES FLETCHER and CRASHAW devoted their muses to sacred subjects, and were almost the first who led the way to that tone and majesty, that dignity of truth with

ich religious poetry is capable of being inspired. But shaw slighted not the more worldly muse, nor lained to pen a sportive epigram, or translate an ode of ullus. His Music's Duel represents a contest between rist and a nightingale for the palm of song; and the n, although overloaded with words, has much of the tic sweetness and imagination of Shelley's verse. bird follows the changing music of the 'lutes-master,' ugh all its windings and modulations, and her bosom 'es,

Till the fledg'd notes at length forsake their nest,  
 Fluttering in wanton shoals, and to the sky,  
 Wing'd with their own wild echoes, prattling fly.  
 She opes the floodgate, and lets loose a tide  
 Of streaming sweetness, which in state doth ride  
 On the wav'd back of every swelling strain,  
 Rising and falling in a pompous train.  
 And while she thus discharges a shrill peal  
 Of flashing airs ; she qualifies their zeal  
 With the cool epod of a graver note,  
 Thus high, thus low, as if her silver throat  
 Would reach the brazen voice of war's hoarse bird ;  
 Her little soul is ravish'd : and so pour'd  
 Into loose extacies, that she is plac'd  
 Above herself, music's enthusiast.

in her human rival concentrates his powers in one t finished burst.

This done, he lists what she would say to this,  
 And she, although her breath's late exercise  
 Had dealt too roughly with her tender throat,  
 Yet summons all her sweet powers for a note.

Alas ! in vain ! for while (sweet soul) she tries  
To measure all those wild diversities  
Of chatt'ring strings, by the small size of one  
Poor simple voice, rais'd in a natural tone ;  
She fails, and failing grieves, and grieving dies.  
She dies : and leaves her life the victor's prize,  
Falling upon his lute. O fit to have,  
(That liv'd so sweetly) dead, so sweet a grave.

The best compositions of DRUMMOND of Hawthornden are some beautiful sonnets and madrigals. They are classical, imaginative, and forcible, yet unequally sustained, and it often occurs that a fine idea is marred by a mean or conceited expression. His language fetters instead of setting free his thoughts. The fire is not wanting, but it is occasionally choked by the very fuel that should support it; the design is lofty, but often obscured by a want of harmony in the detail. These observations might be illustrated better than by the following sonnet, which teems with beauty, and is one of the best specimens of Drummond :

Now while the night her sable veil hath spread,  
And silently her resty coach doth roll,  
Rousing with her from Tethys' azure bed  
Those starry nymphs which dance about the pole—  
While Cynthia, in purest cypress clad,  
The Latmian shepherd in a trance descries,  
And looking pale from height of all the skies,  
She dyes her beauties in a blushing red.  
While sleep, in triumph, closed hath all eyes,  
And birds and beasts a silence sweet do keep ;  
And Proteus' monstrous people in the deep,  
The winds and waves hush'd up, to rest entice—  
I wake, I turn, I weep, opprest with pain,  
Perplex'd in the meanders of my brain.

CAREW, who wrote songs of gallantry, yet not free  
n licentiousness; LOVELACE, tender and elegant, yet  
ceited; SUCKLING, florid and epigrammatic, and  
VENANT, often fanciful and brilliant, were the poets of  
court of Charles the First. The lines of the last,  
ressed to that monarch's queen, Henrietta Matilda,  
full of the polish, expression, and refinement of Pope.  
calls her

Fair as unshaded light; or as the day  
In its first birth, when all the year was May;  
Sweet, as the altar's smoke, or as the new  
Unfolded bud, swell'd by the early dew;  
Smooth, as the face of waters first appear'd,  
'Ere tides began to strive, or winds were heard:  
Kind as the willing saints, and calmer far  
Than in their sleep forgiven hermits are.\*

The following little piece by Carew, entitled Red and  
ite Roses, is in his liveliest style :

Read in these roses the sad story  
Of my hard fate, and your own glory :  
In the white you may discover  
The paleness of a fainting lover;  
In the red, the flames still feeding  
On my heart with fresh wounds bleeding.  
The white will tell you how I languish,  
And the red express my anguish :

Pope has imitated some of these lines in his Epistle from Eloisa to  
rd. The life of the recluse lover is represented to be  
Still as the seas, 'ere winds were taught to blow,  
Or moving spirit bade the waters flow;  
Soft as the slumbers of a saint forgiven,  
And mild as opening gleams of promis'd heaven,

The white my innocence displaying,  
The red my martyrdom betraying.  
The frowns that on your brow resided,  
Have those roses thus divided ;  
Oh ! let your smiles but clear the weather,  
And then they both shall grow together.

The best production of Suckling is a ballad on a wedding, told by a countryman on his return from London ; it is easy, flowing, and happy, and so full of rustic humor, that one might imagine a crowd of villagers listening with open mouths and half incredulous air to the wonders of the narrator. His Sessions of the Poets is a humorous little satire ; and the poem 'To a Lady on her going out of England' (of which the following lines form the commencement) is very expressive and poetical :

I must confess, when I did part from you,  
I could not force an artificial dew  
Upon my cheeks, nor with a gilded phrase  
Express how many hundred several ways  
My heart was tortur'd, nor with arms across  
In discontented garbs set forth my loss :  
Such loud expressions many times do come  
From lightest hearts, great griefs are always dumb ;  
The shallow rivers roar, the deep are still ;  
Numbers of painted words may shew much skill ;  
But little anguish and a cloudy face  
Is oft put on, to serve both time and place.

The spirit of party and religious zeal which distressed the country during the troubled reign of the first Charles, as it operated on the manners, affected no less the literature of the period. Wit, brilliancy, and fancy

filled the court, and songs of compliment and gallantry were cherished by the loyalists. They honoured whatever was elegant and refined in their day ; and however lax in principle or wanting in morality, they loved those lighter arts which are the ornaments of society, and which, if they cannot improve its character, can at least gild its surface. The very conceits of the period flowed from a refinement of fashion, hollow indeed, but for the time attractive ; and served as so many proofs of the genius of their admirers. Learning was not disregarded, but it threw off the guise of pedantry. New channels of information had long since been open to mankind ; and a tone of easy elegance was established, alluring to all within the influence of its charms.

But there was a deeper and sterner feeling operating upon another class. A spirit of reflection had arisen in the community—the late reformation in religion had taught men to canvass subjects never before questioned—from the discussion of sacred they turned to political matters, and carried to them the zeal and dogmas of puritanism. They were generally unlearned but sincere : confounding abstract truths with prejudices, forgetting the circumstances by which they were surrounded, soured with opposition or neglect, they formed lofty but crude notions of their rights, and, contrasting them with their condition, they became restless and gloomy, severe and determined. The dogmatic spirit, which at first prompted, afterwards fostered this tone of mind, until it

swelled into enthusiasm ; and its votaries became no less political than spiritual devotees.

The poetry of such a race must have been marked by its prevailing features : by imagination, when once aroused, bold and grasping ; by striking and original thoughts ; by language energetic and decisive ; and over all their truths and errors, alike glaring and profound, by the glow of enthusiasm falling, not softly like sunlight through the tracery of stained windows, but streaming with the fresh vehemence of a summer noon, as it bursts over some rude pile of rocks, and throws a halo round their ruggedness.

It was from such a people, free from their worst prejudices, enlightened by their best spirit, with a zeal and imagination flushed by the genius of the times, that Milton arose. In power, beauty, and sublimity, he has been compared to Homer,— “ Shakspeare alone excelled them both ; but *he* went beyond all men, and stands in the array of human intellect, like the sun in the system, single and unapproachable.”\*

\* Edinburgh Review, vol. 42, page 58.

**LECTURE ON THE POETRY OF MILTON,  
AND SOME OF HIS CONTEMPORARIES.**



# LECTURE

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POETRY OF MILTON,  
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THERE is no less difference in the literature than in the moral state of man in the several ages of society. At the early dawn of civilization we meet with poetry full of bold and lofty conception, of that power and eloquence with which strong passions are generally expressed by the uneducated; teeming with the masculine efforts of an imagination nursed amidst the wilds of nature, glowing with the illusions of superstition, and untamed by that acquaintance with science and philosophy, which while it renders us wiser and better, and makes us familiar with the hidden secrets of creation, destroys in some measure the enthusiasm of those first impressions, the awe and the wonder with which the ignorant mind is filled by the complicated grandeur of the external world, and the

sensible but mysterious workings of human passions and perceptions. All is bold, nervous, and substantial, but at the same time wild, irregular, and unsystematized. The authors are without models, almost without design, and their poetry seems the beautiful outpouring of those many and disconnected images which have floated upon the mind, and at last burst out in one mingled and overwhelming torrent.

Then comes the union of partial knowledge with imagination: a perception of moral truths, a regard for human affections, martial fables and legends of love; and we trace the first successful attempts at design, although rudely and obscurely developed. Afterwards appear the classical allusion, the refined allegory, tales of sustained interest, and lyrical effusions of healthy imagination, verse regular in metre, bold in expression, and somewhat artfully constructed. Then break in the glitter of learning, the affectation of wit, the courtly compliment, and the quaint conceit, language fluent but artificial, fancy exuberant yet fantastic—the verse improves, but the soul that should inspire it is wanting; the taint of disease comes over the more highly intellectual powers of the mind, and Ingenuity usurps the throne from which Genius has departed.

Such almost was the poetry of the period when Milton arose. He came with a new spirit, but with the power and inspiration of old. He was as the cedar of Lebanon

among the lesser trees of the forest; but wild flowers were blooming at its feet and threw their rich fragrance above, till the topmost branches of the lofty and gloomy tree waved with the breath and lived amidst the perfume of the simple and beautiful children of the spring. The sublimity and moral dignity of Milton's conception did not chill his feelings of natural tenderness, but we see in his works the warm and susceptible spirit searching for poetry in the commonest objects and affections of nature, as well as in her grandest and loftiest attributes; and the man who sang the warfare of angels and the proud contentions of spiritual hosts, had a fine and delicate sense of the ordinary household virtues of the humblest of mankind.

It was the lot of Milton to live in an eventful age. The revival of learning first, and subsequently the reformation in religion had necessarily rendered men inquisitive, reflective, and argumentative, and lessened their reverence for old established institutions and opinions. The Reformation was not effected without some temporary inconveniences. It shook the antique belief, it threw down those idols, it abolished those ceremonies which the ignorant and credulous had learned to venerate as essential parts of the great system of religion; and it appealed to the reason and judgment of many who on such topics had as yet but little reason or judgment to exercise. They saw the vast and ancient fabric fall into decay, and were too skilless to assist

unitedly in constructing a better and a simpler one. Religious faith was unsettled, and sectarians arose whose homely arguments appealed to the unlettered, or whose plausible sophistries convinced the credulous. The new Establishment required time to inculcate its tenets and settle its authority in the hearts and affections of the many, and wanted at first those associations and ancient ties which bind men to their ancestral religion. These causes produced internal division in the ranks of the reformers, which the study of ancient philosophy by no means tended to diminish. The arguments of the classical writers are speculative and discursive, full of brilliant and plausible reasoning, but also of conflicting principles. It is sect arrayed against sect, school against school, where every one according to his peculiar temperament may select his peculiar system of moral perfection. The study of such authors is well adapted to render the reasoning powers subtle and acute; but as a trifling fallacy in the premises of an argument will often lead to conclusions essentially wrong, and as the facts of metaphysics are less defined and comprehensible than those of natural philosophy, it will not appear surprising that men in the sixteenth and early part of the seventeenth century, scarcely free from the errors they attempted to discard, and warped by party feelings and prejudices, should have formed contrary and conflicting opinions, and entered with warmth into the defence of those many views, each of which had its advocates, and was equally believed to be right.

Political circumstances tended in the end to foment these differences. While the Establishment was yet in its infancy, it was subject to the persecutions and proscription of Mary, and in the reign of Elizabeth there was almost a new Reformation to effect. Happily the attention of the nation was for a time diverted by the domestic vigor and foreign glories of the administration; but under the first James those discussions were heard, and that spirit was alive which darkened the reign and overthrew the government of the unfortunate Charles. These religious discussions being based on first principles, and asserting the liberties of conscience, soon drew the attention of men to their social liberties, at that time invaded by a weak and misguided prince, and but inadequately secured against the high and increasing exercises of kingly prerogative. Then appeared the noble and uncompromising spirit that distinguished Hampden, Pym, Elliott, and the other patriots of the time ; and the heavings of the coming tempest were heard throughout the land. A people arose to assert and battle for rights which in the darkness and silence of former ages they had lost without a murmur, and the proud authority to which their ancestors had submitted was now looked upon with coldness and distrust. The court was filled with the generous and devoted admirers of princely dignity and splendor—men moreover personally attached to a monarch whose private life was distinguished by natural piety, by family affections, and by engaging manners. On either side there was zeal, principle, and

high motive. It was a stern conflict for a great and mighty purpose; and happy would it have been if the passions which party always engenders had stopped short of their last extremity, and History been spared that tragedy which stains one of her most useful but gloomiest pages.

We find the opinions of the different factions expressed in the poetry as well as in the polemical literature of the period, giving a tone and color to the efforts of the imagination, and ranging the Muses themselves under the party banners of the times. On the one side we have gallantry approaching to levity, and an attachment to institutions rendered venerable by age; on the other, the vehement and masculine efforts of minds educated in the rugged school of disputation, proud of their independence, and looking with suspicion on old forms, old usages, and old sentiments.

While Carew, Suckling, Davenant, and Lovelace were delighting the courtly taste of the cavaliers with the wit and license of their lays, Milton in the seclusion of the country composed his beautiful Masque of Comus. It abounds in learned allusion, in profuse imagery, and in that power of language in which he stands alone. The tale is slight. The Masque consists of some allegory or poetical legend thrown into the form of a dialogue, and relieved with lyrical stanzas which were generally sung. The drama, if it merit that name, was privately played

before select circles upon festive occasions, and the characters were not sustained by professional actors. Such were the masques often performed by the students of the Inner Temple, and of the Universities. Comus was presented at Ludlow Castle in 1634 before the Earl of Bridgewater, then president of Wales; and the chief characters were represented by the Lord Brackley, Mr. Thomas Egerton his brother, and the Lady Alice Egerton.

A maiden lost in the depths of a forest amidst the shades of night is beguiled into the haunts of Comus, the son of Circe, a spirit who lures his victims into his realm of pleasures, and offers them 'orient liquor from a crystal cup,' which potion so distorts their countenances that they resemble the brutish forms of the grosser animals, while the enchanted, so far from perceiving their foul disfigurement, boast themselves comelier than before. Comus is first attracted by the song of the lady, and testifies his wonderment and delight at those sweet sounds in the following outbreak of eloquent verse :

Can any mortal mixture of earth's mould  
 Breathe such divine enchanting ravishment?  
 Sure something holy lodges in that breast,  
 And with these raptures moves the vocal air  
 To testify his hidden residence.  
 How sweetly did they float upon the wings  
 Of silence through the empty-vaulted night,  
 At every fall smoothing the raven down  
 Of darkness, till it smiled! I have oft heard  
 My mother Circe with the Syrens three,

Amidst the flowery-kirtled Naiades,  
 Culling their potent herbe and baleful drugs ;  
 Who, as they sung, would take the prison'd soul,  
 And lop it in Elysium ; Scylla wept,  
 And chid her barking waves into attention,  
 And fell Charybdis murmur'd soft applause :  
 Yet they in pleasing slumber lull'd the sense,  
 And in sweet madness robb'd it of itself ;  
 But such a sacred and home-felt delight,  
 Such sober certainty of waking bliss,  
 I never heard till now. I'll speak to her,  
 And she shall be my queen.

The brothers of the lady wander through the wood  
 in search of their sister, discoursing somewhat dispassionately of the dangers by which she is surrounded, and  
 the power of chastity to sustain her untainted through  
 all. They are accosted by the attendant spirit in the  
 disguise of the shepherd Thyrus, one

Whose artful strains have oft delay'd  
 The huddling brook to hear his madrigal,  
 And sweeten'd every musk rose of the dale.

The spirit leads them to the stately palace of Comus, set  
 out with delicious luxuries, where voluptuous banquets  
 are spread, and the lapse of soft music steals upon the  
 senses. Here they arrive just as the lady has triumphed  
 over the wiles of the enchanter, and by the further  
 assistance of the water-nymph Sabrina, the spell is  
 broken, and the moral inculcated :

Mortals that would follow me,  
 Love Virtue ; she alone is free ;

She can teach you how to climb  
Higher than the sphery clime;  
Or if Virtue feeble were,  
Heaven itself would stoop to her.

Such is the outline of the Masque. But it is not in plot merely, nor character, nor dialogue that the chief merit of the drama consists. The plot is too flimsy, the persons are too cold, the dialogue is too constrained and argumentative ; it has the full body of verse, but it wants the ease of conversation—it is too didactic. But it enshrines gorgeous and elaborate imagery, and if it be lofty where we had rather it should be familiar, if it want some of those natural touches that would identify its characters more closely with humanity, if it have no unrestrained outbreak of passion or feeling, it attracts us on the other hand with poetry of fine imagination, magnificent though undramatic. Whether he describe the virgin nymph flying the mad pursuit of her enraged step-dame, and commanding her innocence to the flood that stayed her flight, where water nymphs held up their pearled wrists and bore her to Nereus, who pitied her woes and gave her to his daughters to embathe in nectared lavers strewed with asphodel, and dropped ambrosial oils into every sense till she revived—whether he paint the argument of a pure mind convincing the overpowered soul of the sensualist, till he conceives her words prompted by a superior power, and is dipped all over in a cold shuddering, as when Jove in his wrath speaks thunder and the chains of Erebus to Saturn's crew—or whether he celebrate

melodies whose soft and solemn breathing rises like a stream of distilled perfume, until even Silence, taken unawares, wishes to deny her nature—there is the same exalted sentiment, the same rich flow and harmony of words, and ideas springing in summer luxuriance, like flowers. But the lyrical part of the poem is doubly excellent; it is fresh and full of music, whether he sing the tipsy revels of the spirit of Night, or call the goddess of the river from her bed of coral, invoking her by the tinsel-slipped feet of Thetys, and the songs of syrens sitting on diamond rocks sleeking their soft tresses.

Nothing can contrast more strongly with the pomp and sound of Milton's blank verse than the ease and fancy of his lyrics. It is true there is the same learning displayed in both, they are alike steeped in the sunny waves of classical allusion, and teem equally with rich and well arranged metaphor; but there is all the solemn stateliness of majesty in the one, and all the gracefulness of natural harmony in the other. Although he brings us to contemplate the deeds of supernal powers with awe and reverence, he leads us in blythe song to tower and terrace, and streams from whose banks rise fragrant groves of myrrh and cinnamon; and paints with warm and happy colors those fairy scenes of which the Spirit sings in the epilogue to Comus :

To the ocean now I fly,  
And those happy climes that lie

Where Day never shuts his eye,  
 Up in the broad fields of the sky :  
 There I suck the liquid air,  
 All amidst the gardens fair  
 Of Hesperus, and his daughters three,  
 That sing about the golden tree :  
 Along the crisped shades and bowers  
 Revels the spruce and jecund Spring ;  
 The Graces, and the rosy-bosom'd Hours,  
 Thither all their bounties bring ;  
 There eternal Summer dwells,  
 And west-winds with musky wing  
 About the cedar alleys fling  
 Nard and Cassia's balmy smells.  
 Iris there with humid bow  
 Waters the odorous banks, that blow  
 Flowers of more mingled hue  
 Than her purfled scarf can shew,  
 And drenches with Elysian dew  
 (List, mortals, if your ears be true !)  
 Beds of hyacinth and roses,  
 Where young Adonis oft reposes,  
 Waxing well of his deep wound  
 In slumber soft, and on the ground  
 Sadly sits th' Assyrian queen ;  
 But far above in spangled sheen  
 Celestial Cupid her famed son advanc'd,  
 Holds his dear Psyche sweet entranc'd,  
 After her wand'ring labours long,  
 Till free consent the Gods among  
 Make her his eternal bride,  
 And from her fair unspotted side  
 Two blissful twins are to be born,  
 Youth and Joy ; so Jove hath sworn.

Just not pass over the beautiful monody of Lycidas, the eloquent tribute ever paid to the memory of a departed ; where the spirit of the indignant politician breaks

into the sorrowful verses of the poet, and draws a contrast between the simple virtues of the hero, and the worldly and selfish hypocrisy of his associates. There is no cold compliment infused into the poem, no quaint and fanciless display of elegiac sweetness; but it speaks the natural feeling of a susceptible mind unburdening its grief, and finding in the tranquillity of the outward world scenes and sounds that harmonize with its pensiveness. "Return," he cries,

Return, Sicilian Muse,  
 And call the vales, and bid them hither cast  
 Their bells, and flow'rets of a thousand hues.  
 Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use  
 Of shades, and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,  
 On whose fresh lap the swart star sparingly looks;  
 Throw hither all your quaint enamell'd eyes,  
 That on the green turf suck the honied showers,  
 And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.  
 Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,  
 The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,  
 The white pink, and the pansy freak'd with jet,  
 The glowing violet,  
 The musk-rose, and the well attir'd woodbine,  
 With cowslips wan, that hang the pensive head,  
 And every flower that sad embroidery wears:  
 Bid Amaranthus all his beauty shed,  
 And daffodillies fill their cups with tears,  
 To strew the laureat hearse where Lycid lies.

Milton sought in foreign travel to add new riches to his well-stored mind. He visited France and Italy and was received in both countries with honor by the learned and distinguished. He would have proceeded to Greece and

Sicily, but the first outbreak of the political tempest was heard over England, and he returned to share the troubles of his country, and advance those principles on which he believed her happiness to depend. He laid down the pen of the poet for that of the polemic, and employed his powerful mind and vast learning in the cause of popular institutions ; and few were they who successfully maintained warfare against a man of strong moral courage armed with weapons such as his. Although during the Commonwealth he reaped some reward of his labors, and was advanced to the office of a private secretary to the Protector; yet so little was his personal consideration amongst his countrymen generally, that Whitlocke talks of him afterwards as “ one Milton, a blind man, who was employed in translating a treaty with Sweden into Latin.”

The triumph, uncertain as it was, of his political opinions was but a poor recompense for his domestic afflictions; and we have in him the painful picture of a great man struggling with neglect from the world, and disaffection and sorrow at home.

From the time of Milton’s return to England until after the Restoration his poetical compositions were few ; but they comprised those glorious productions, *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, verses so happy, so fluent, so teeming with rich yet natural images, that no one who has read them (and to all of us they are familiar) can forget the first impression they conveyed, or does not still treasure

them in his memory. "It is impossible,"—says an author who well appreciated his subject,\*—"to conceive that the mechanism of language can be brought to a more exquisite degree of perfection. These poems differ from others as ottar of roses differs from rose water, the close packed essence from the thin diluted mixture. They are indeed not so much poems, as collections of hints, from each of which the reader is to make out a poem for himself, every epithet is a text for a canto."

Without passing hastily from the earlier to the later and nobler works of Milton, let us return to glance at the writings of those who first appeared at about the same time as himself, and served in some measure to fill up the interval that ensued.

To DAVENANT I have already hastily alluded; he was a gallant royalist devoted to the interests of the court—in peace he was celebrated for the happy flow of his lyrics, in the civil wars he was valorous but unfortunate. Through the influence of Milton he escaped the vengeance of the conquering republicans, and exercised his versatile genius in the composition of dramas, which enjoyed a considerable but not very lasting reputation. While Davenant had many of the essentials of an amusing writer, he had not those of a great poet. His imagination wanted not only power but discipline.

\* Edinburgh Review, vol. 42, page 312.

Loftiness and proportion were beyond his reach, so he contented himself with shining by fits and starts. He looked upon the rules and systems of composition as inconveniences, and thought he was original when he disregarded them. His *Gondibert*, which he calls an epic, met with its admirers, and he has written a long preface to prove its excellencies; but neither its metre, plot, characters, or execution have rescued it from the neglect of modern times, and it remains in our collections of English poetry, the relic of a lively but ill-regulated fancy, strewn with beauties, but deficient in that symmetry which would have rendered those beauties brighter and conspicuous.

ABRAHAM COWLEY was a poet of far greater pretensions. From his infancy he was gifted with the spirit of song, and had he lived in other times his reputation and his works would have been more unobscured. He was attached to the royalists, but like other of his contemporaries his principles apparently succumbed to the successive ruling powers. He lived in unmolested retirement during the protectorship, and if he felt, did not give utterance to political discontent.

The beauties as well as the defects of Cowley's poetry are sufficiently obvious. He speculates, he refines, he philosophizes; he exults in ideas rather than in feelings, in the operations of the mind rather than of the passions. He indulges in metaphysical subtleties until he becomes

bewildered, and the thread of his poetry wants unravelling. He enters into the analysis of a sense instead of painting its effects, he pourtrays the existence of the mental faculties, instead of forming a character. His works are full of thought and reflection; but his thoughts are not always perspicuous, and his reflections are too abstracted. Here and there his muse in her wilfulness throws aside her artificial costume, and then he is natural, tender, and fanciful. He had not the power of evoking living forms from the depths of his imagination, and enduing them with the high and deep passions—he dealt not with the world of substance, but left others to celebrate human actions, while he speculated upon human sensations. He loved to contemplate the mind and its mysterious operations, and regarded them with the pensive attention of a philosopher, separating them from the material body by which they were sustained, until he almost forgot the link which binds the animal to the spiritual life of man. Hence it is that while his reflections have sentiment and harmony, his persons are deficient in the common impulses of mankind. He wrote songs to an imaginary mistress, he composed a long poem on plants in elegant Latin, and sang the exploits of David in heroic strains; but the uniform character of the poet's mind is visible in all: his songs are gallant compliments, but have little of the genuine devotion of real affection—his books of plants are replete with fanciful descriptions and florid but unempassioned verse—and his *Davidëis* wants that nerve, plot, and construction which alone could give it vigor and

reality. Cowley was among the first of our authors who composed in the irregular Pindaric metres; but he was not always judicious in their application, and is guilty of many lines that are very inharmonious, although he has whole poems full of music—such are his Anacreontics. We all from childhood remember the chirping little Ode to the grasshopper, and the following imitation of the Grecian's tipsy logic in praise of wine has much of the spirit of the original :

The thirsty earth soaks up the rain,  
And drinks, and gapes for drink again.  
The plants suck in the earth, and are  
With constant drinking fresh and fair.  
The sea itself, which one would think  
Should have but little need of drink,  
Drinks ten thousand rivers up,  
So fill'd that they o'erflow the cup.  
The busy sun (and one would guess  
By's drunken fiery face no less)  
Drinks up the sea, and when he 'as done,  
The moon and stars drink up the sun.  
They drink and dance by their own light,  
They drink and revel all the night.  
Nothing in Nature's sober found,  
But an eternal health goes round.  
Fill up the bowl, then, fill it high,  
Fill all the glasses there, for why  
Should ev'ry creature drink but I;  
Why, men of morals, tell me why?

Cowley's Hymn to Light has all his peculiarities, but it has also all his merits. It rises at times to the verge of sublimity, but occasionally trembles from its 'pride of

place.' It commences with a glorious personification. Light no longer appears a mere immaterial essence, or a subtle fluid pervading and streaming over nature; but it beams before us like an angel, with joy on its countenance and freedom on its wings. The poem is too long to quote entire, but I have culled a few of its best stanzas:

## I.

First born of Chaos, who so fair didst come  
From the old Negro's darksome womb!  
Which, when it saw the lovely child,  
The melancholy mass put on kind looks and smil'd.

## III.

Hail! active Nature's watchful life and health!  
Her joy, her ornament, and wealth!  
Hail to thy husband, Heat, and thee!  
Thou the world's beauteous bride, the lusty bridegroom he!

## VII.

Thou in the moon's bright chariot, proud and gay,  
Dost thy bright wood of stars survey,  
And all the year dost with thee bring  
Of thousand flow'ry lights thine own nocturnal spring.

## IX.

Nor amidst all these triumphs dost thou scorn  
The humble glow-worms to adorn,  
And with those living spangles gild  
(O greatness without pride!) the bushes of the field.

## XIII.

At thy appearance, Grief himself is said  
To shake his wings, and rouse his head;  
And cloudy Care has often took  
A gentle beamy smile reflected from thy look.

## XIV.

At thy appearance, Fear himself grows bold ;  
 Thy sunshine melts away his cold :  
 Encourag'd at the sight of thee,  
 To the cheek color comes, and firmness to the knee.

## XVI.

When, Goddess ! thou lift'st up thy waken'd head  
 Out of the morning's purple bed,  
 Thy choir of birds about thee play,  
 And all the joyful world salutes the rising day.

## XIX.

A crimson garment in the rose thou wear'st ;  
 A crown of studded gold thou bear'st ;  
 The virgin lilies, in their white,  
 Are clad but with the lawn of almost naked light.

## XX.

The violet, spring's little infant, stands  
 Girt in thy purple swaddling bands.

\*       \*       \*

## XXIV.

Through the soft ways of heav'n, and air, and sea,  
 Which open all their pores to thee,  
 Like a clear river thou dost glide,  
 And with thy living stream through the close channels slide.

Cowley was well versed in the poetry and philosophy of the ancients, and has scattered classical allusions and expressions throughout his works with a profuse hand. If he had neither the calm dignity of the Grecian, nor the power or polish of the Roman authors, he occasionally carried their spirit into his productions ; and even in his least sustained and most labored poems, there is evidence

of a chaste imagination educated after pure models, but deficient in that lore which is to be drawn from the survey of real and active life.

SIR WILLIAM WALLER was related to Hampden and Cromwell, and played a conspicuous part in the political drama of the stormy period in which he lived. He was a man of brilliant and lively accomplishments, with an easy flow of wit at his command, and those engaging manners which purchase a ready popularity. In parliament his speeches were elegant and happy, and remarkable both for their eloquence and moderation. Such a character was at best but an uncertain ally of the stern and enthusiastic beings with whom by circumstance he was united. He deprecated the ultra views of the Independents, and was the champion of the Presbyterian party ; was even concerned in unsuccessful measures for the restoration of the King, but vindicated the influence and the cause of the Protector during the Commonwealth. He was however among the first to greet the new Monarch on his return to England, and abandon those principles which before he had successfully advocated.

Waller's poetry is celebrated for its fluency and melody. He wrote at his leisure, as his fancy dictated, and threw off his lines with the negligent ease of one to whom literature was but an amusement. His stanzas have not the appearance of being studied ; they are gracefully modulated, and the ideas they contain flung together

without an attempt to elaborate or make the most of them. He was not a poet of high imagination, he did not attempt any of the more difficult branches of the art, but courted the inspiration of the humbler muses. He excels in tender complimentary lyrics, which, if they want the freshness of nature, are generally glittering, happy, and fanciful. His stanzas 'To a Lady singing a Song of his composing' contain the same fine image which Byron in his English Bards and Scotch Reviewers has enlarged and applied to the fate of Kirke White.\*

Chloris! yourself you so excel,  
When you vouchsafe to breathe my thought,  
That, like a spirit, with this spell  
Of my own teaching, I am caught.

That eagle's fate and mine are one,  
Which, on the shaft that made him die,  
Espied a feather of his own,  
Wherewith he wot to soar so high.

Had Echo, with so sweet a grace,  
Narcissus' loud complaints returned,  
Not for reflection of his face,  
But of his voice, the boy had burned.

I pass over, amongst his addresses to political characters, the panegyric 'to my Lord Protector on the present greatness and joint interest of his Highness and the nation,' but will quote a few of his lines on the death of Cromwell :

\* The simile was borrowed by Waller himself from the Greek.

We must resign ! Heav'n his great soul does claim  
 In storms, as loud as his immortal fame :  
 His dying groans, his last breath shakes our isle,  
 And trees uncut fall for his funeral pile ;  
 About his palace their broad roots are lost  
 Into the air.—So Romulus was lost !

\*       \*       \*

The ocean, which so long our hopes confin'd,  
 Could give no limits to his vaster mind.

\*       \*       \*

Ungrateful then ! if we no tears allow  
 To him that gave us peace and empire too.  
 Princes that fear'd him grieve, concern'd to see  
 No pitch of glory from the grave is free.

After the Restoration, Waller was equally ready with verses ‘To the King upon His Majesty’s happy Return.’ Charles the Second however remarked that they were very inferior to those upon the death of the Protector; and Waller’s reply at once shewed the superiority of his wit to his principle: “Poets, Sir,” he replied, “succeed better in fiction than in truth.”

SIR JOHN DENHAM’s popular work is Cooper’s Hill, the most polished and classical specimen of descriptive poetry which then existed. Pope calls him the ‘lofty,’ ‘the majestic Denham;’ and his verses have all that terseness and elegance of expression which distinguish the best of Pope’s—that beautiful ease yet conciseness, that high temper and refinement, which make them resemble those curious remains of mosaic work, where the hardest and the brightest of gems and marbles are carved and inlaid into one compact and solid figure by the

ning hand of the artificer. Such is his description of Thames, as true as it is popular.

Thames! the most lov'd of all the Ocean's sons,  
 By his old sire, to his embraces runs,  
 Hasting to pay his tribute to the sea,  
 Like mortal life to meet eternity ;  
 Though with those streams he no resemblance hold,  
 Whose foam is amber, and their gravel gold :  
 His genuine and less guilty wealth t' explore,  
 Search not his bottom, but survey his shore,  
 O'er which he kindly spreads his spacious wing,  
 And hatcheth plenty for th' ensuing spring ;  
 Nor then destroys it with too fond a stay,  
 Like mothers which their infants overlay ;  
 Nor with a sudden and impetuous wave,  
 Like profuse kings, resumes the wealth he gave.  
 No unexpected inundations spoil  
 The mower's hopes, nor mock the ploughman's toil;  
 But godlike his unwearied bounty flows ;  
 First loves to do, then loves the good he does.  
 Nor are his blessings to his banks confin'd,  
 But free and common as the sea or wind ;  
 When he, to boast or to disperse his stores,  
 Full of the tributes of his grateful shores,  
 Visits the world, and in his flying tow'rs  
 Brings home to us, and makes both Indies ours ;  
 Finds wealth where 'tis, bestows it where it wants,  
 Cities in deserts, woods in cities plants.  
 So that to us no thing, no place is strange,  
 While his fair bosom is the world's exchange.  
 O could I flow like thee ! and make thy stream  
 My great example, as it is my theme ;  
 Though deep yet clear, though gentle yet not dull ;  
 Strong without rage, without o'erflowing full.

Denham was a true royalist, and wrote many political quinades for his party, which are curious relics of the

pointed doggrel to which the contentions of the period gave rise. But the most extraordinary work that sprang out of the state of society after the Restoration was BUTLER's *Hudibras*, a poem which, even now when the race of characters it celebrates, and the feelings it embodies have passed away, is still popular from the pungency of its wit, the remarkable fluency of its verse, and cleverness of its rhymes; while to those who are well acquainted with the opinions and habits of the great parties which existed after the return of the Stuarts, it derives new charms from the merit of its caricature, sketched in the spirit of Cervantes and with much of his skill.

I have not time to enter at length into the adventures of Sir Hudibras, his equipment, his exploits and his arguments, his encounters in the field, his imprisonment and release by the widow who restored his person to liberty but took his affections captive; his interview with the magician Sidrophel, his unrequited passion and sad mischances, his letter to the widow, or the answer he received; these form the framework of the poem which supports a continued and biting satire on the thoughts, principles, and actions of the Puritans—a party exposed by their rigid notions and uncompromising habits to that ridicule which lays hold on the outward peculiarities of men, and by a slight overcoloring places them in a most ludicrous light. The style is so diffuse that it is difficult to select an extract of moderate length, which is intelligible when separated from the context, but here is Ralphe's story of the Cobbler who killed the Indian:

Justice gives sentence many times  
 On one man for another's crimes,  
 Our brethren of New England use  
 Choice malefactors to excuse,  
 And hang the guiltless in their stead,  
 Of whom the churches have less need;  
 As lately 't happened : In a town  
 There liv'd a cobbler, and but one,  
 That out of doctrine could cut use,  
 And mend men's lives, as well as shoes:  
 This precious brother having slain,  
 In times of peace, an Indian,  
 Not out of malice, but mere zeal,  
 (Because he was an Infidel)  
 The mighty Tottipottymoy  
 Sent to our elders an envoy,  
 Complaining sorely of the breach  
 Of league, held forth by Brother Patch,  
 Against the articles in force  
 Between both churches, his and ours,  
 For which he crav'd the saints to render  
 Into his hands, or hang th'offender;  
 But they maturely having weigh'd  
 They had no more but him o' th' trade,  
 (A man that served them in a double  
 Capacity, to teach and cobble)  
 Resolv'd to spare him ; yet, to do  
 The Indian Hogan Moghan too—  
 Impartial Justice, in his stead did  
 Hang an old weaver that was bed rid.

ANDREW MARVEL was one of the purest and most  
 consistent of the patriots of the Commonwealth—he was not  
 swayed by those motives of self-interest which in an unsettled  
 period often determine a man's course, and lead him  
 to purchase a doubtful popularity by advocating principles  
 which he is ready to sacrifice at the first ascendancy of the

opposite party—but with genuine independence he maintained the same undisguised opinions amidst all the changes through which he lived. He is more celebrated for his prose compositions than his poems, which are not many, but have generally a freshness and freedom, a natural and manly tenderness, and breathe that spirit of liberty and piety for which their author was eminently distinguished. His Emigrant's Hymn is far above the common order of devotional verse, and shews the warmth and power of his zealous and unpretending mind.

Where the remote Bermudas ride  
 In the ocean's bosom, unespied,  
 From a small boat that row'd along,  
 The listening winds receiv'd their song.

“ What should we do, but sing His praise  
 “ That led us through the watery maze  
 “ Unto an isle so long unknown,  
 “ And yet far kinder than our own !

“ Where He the huge sea monsters racks,  
 “ That lift the deep upon their backs,  
 “ He lands us on a grassy stage,  
 “ Safe from the storms and prelates' rage.

“ He gave us this eternal spring  
 “ Which here enamels every thing,  
 “ And sends the fowls to us, in care,  
 “ On daily visits through the air.

“ He hangs in shades the orange bright,  
 “ Like golden lampe in a green night,  
 “ And in these rocks for us did frame  
 “ A temple where to sound his name.

"Oh ! let our voice His praise exalt,  
 "Till it arrive at Heaven's vault,  
 "Which then perhaps, rebounding, may  
 "Echo beyond the Mexique bay."

Thus sang they, in the English boat,  
 A holy and a cheerful note,  
 And all the way, to guide their chime,  
 With falling oars they kept the time.

There was also Old ISAAC WALTON, the quaint angler and poet, who loved to rove by the blue waters, with his fishing rod and hook, and enlivened his patient amusement with reflections upon the beauties of nature, and songs springing from the buoyancy of a light and happy heart.

After the restoration the crowd of wits who had fluttered about the former court again appeared, and the king was hailed to his throne with the congratulations of poets and courtiers, each eager to outdo his fellows in the fervor of his compliment and exultation, and to lay the richest offering at the shrine of revived royalty—but it was far different with Milton;—poor, blind, disgraced, with nothing but his virtues to console, and his intrepid mind to support him, he was driven into concealment until the first flush of public excitement had subsided. The Government, content with the sacrifice of nobler victims, pursued him not with vigilance, but caused some of his political writings to be burned by the ignominious hands of the common hangman. To a mind of less natural vigor or more relaxed discipline than Milton's, his

successive family afflictions, the overthrow of his present ambitions, the insecurity of his person, his blindness, and his infirmities would have produced a despondency destructive to its best and noblest powers—but he remained firm and serene through all, triumphing in the integrity of his purpose,\* with a temper chastened, and a judgment matured by the mighty and conflicting scenes he had beheld, with an intellect accustomed to grapple with weighty arguments and grown unconquerable by the very process through which it had been nurtured. He had marked the stern and strong passions acting on a large scale; he had traced the soaring and ambitious mind through all the changes of labor, success, and ultimate defeat; he had seen the spirit rendered proud by victory, unnerved by reverses, or retaining its haughtiness even in misfortune—he had known those great characters, which in times of trouble rise from the mass of mankind like superior intelligencies to direct and control the energies of those from whom but yesterday they sprang, and he had a clear insight into the motives and principles which actuated the heroes of the day—and all this he had contemplated with a philosophical purpose—popular Liberty had been his idol, and when it wanted a champion he was the first beneath its banners—yet he defended it not as a mere partisan, but from thorough and carefully formed conviction, and when once convinced, he was no cold advocate, but his heart and affections were engaged

\* He has left us a noble picture of the tranquillity of his dignified mind in one of his fine sonnets to Cyriac Skinner.

in the cause he espoused. He passed his life in a wild and unsettled school, but his mind drew nutriment from the discordant materials before it, and at a time of life when the faculties generally decay, and the invention becomes languid, *his* attained their fullest and most perfect power, and he stood like a fortress, round which tempests have careered, and ages, that could not destroy, have left their blue traces, but within the light still burns, and the tower rises through the mist, a beacon to the weary and weather beaten, and a defence to the shore upon which it stands.

It is with some feelings of pride for human nature, that we follow the disgraced and afflicted man to the seclusion of his study, and view him who had held converse with the master spirits of his time, meditating upon the loftier beings that people more spiritual realms, contemplating in fallen angels the passions and ambitions he had observed in human life, and looking beyond the world for the source of those virtues and principles that dignify the better part of mankind.

In Paradise Lost, after the proposition of the subject and invocation, we are introduced to those gloomy realms, where the infernal legions that warred against heaven and were defeated in their venturous design, lay thunderstruck in the burning lake, overwhelmed with waves of fire, that gave no light but rather made darkness visible; the horrid silence was broken by Satan addressing Beëlzebub, his

next in dignity, and after a conference between those fallen angels, Beëlzebub advised his superior, the leader of the bright armies which none but the Omnipotent could foil, that if once they heard his voice—heard so often in extremes and on the perilous edge of battle—they would resume new courage and revive.

He scarce had ceas'd, when the superior Fiend  
 Was moving tow'rd the shore ; his pond'rous shield,  
 Ethereal temper, massy, large, and round,  
 Behind him cast ; the broad circumference  
 Hung on his shoulders like the moon, whose orb  
 Through optic glass the Tuscan artist views  
 At evening from the top of Fesole,  
 Or in Valdarno, to descry new lands,  
 Rivers, or mountains, in her spotty globe.  
 His spear, to equal which the tallest pine,  
 Hewn on Norwegian hills to be the mast  
 Of some great admiral, were but a wand,  
 He walk'd with to support uneasy steps  
 Over the burning marle, not like those steps  
 On heaven's azure, and the torrid clime  
 Smote on him sore besides, vaulted with fire ;  
 Nathless, he so endur'd, till on the beach  
 Of that inflamed sea he stood, and call'd  
 His legions, angel forms, who lay entranc'd,  
 Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks  
 In Valambrosa, where th' Etrurian shades  
 High over-arch'd embow'r.      \*      \*

\*      \*      So thick bestrewn,  
 Abject and lost lay these, covering the flood,  
 Under amazement of their hideous change.  
 He call'd so loud, that all the hollow deep  
 Of hell resounded. “Princes, Potentates,  
 “Warriors, th' flow'r of heav'n, once yours, now lost,  
 “If such astonishment as this can seize  
 “Eternal spirits ; or have you chosen this place,

"After the toll of battle, to repose  
 "Your wearied virtue, for the ease you find  
 "To slumber here, as in the vales of heav'n ?  
 "Or in this abject posture have you sworn  
 "To adore the Conqueror, who now beholds  
 "Cherub and Seraph rolling in the flood  
 "With scatter'd arms and ensigns, till anon  
 "His swift pursuers from heav'n gates discern  
 "Th' advantage, and descending tread us down  
 "Thus drooping, or with linked thunderbolts  
 "Transfix us to the bottom of this gulf.  
 "Awake, arise, or be for ever fallen !"

Myriads of spirits rose at the call, numberless as a pitchy cloud of locusts. Their leaders, godlike forms who before had sat on thrones in heaven, came singly before their emperor at his bidding, while the promiscuous crowd stood aloof. All flocked with downcast and damped looks, in which gleamed some obscure glimpse of joy, and Satan with high words raised their drooping courage. His mighty ensign was unfurled to the sound of trumpets and clarions, while a shout arose that frightened the realms of night and chaos, and in a moment innumerable banners, and a huge forest of spears, and helms, and shields shone in dense array, and the phalanx, inspired not by rage but deliberate valor, moved forwards to the Doric measures of flutes and soft recorders. Satan's heart distended with pride as he viewed the concourse ; and when he prepared to speak, the double ranks mute with attention, bent from wing to wing half enclosing him and his peers. Thrice he essayed to address them, and thrice, in spite of scorn, was checked by the outburst of

such tears as angels weep. He told them, according to the prophecy of heaven, of the creation of a new world and of man, and referred them to a full council to deliberate what course they should pursue. As he spake there flew out to confirm his words millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs of mighty cherubim, the sudden blaze of which illumined hell. The hosts betook themselves to new labors, and there arose, like an exhalation, a huge temple adorned with pilasters and Doric pillars on whose friezes were graven bossy sculptures, while the roof was of fretted gold, pendant from which starry lamps and brazen cressets yielded light as from a sky. Satan presided at the council on a throne of royal state, and displayed his proud imagination in the discussion ; declaring that he gave not up heaven for lost, but doubted whether by open war or covert stratagem to regain their power. Moloch, the strongest and fiercest spirit that fought in heaven, declared for open war, and ended with a frown that denounced desperate revenge. Belial, more graceful and humane, than whom a fairer person lost not heaven, who seemed composed for high exploit and dignity, but who, while his tongue dropped manna, would make the worse appear the better reason—Belial counselled from their present condition that they should not further by open war aggravate the hostility of the Almighty ; urging that when conformed in temper and nature to the place where they then dwelt, its fierce heat would grow familiar and its fervent horrors mild. Mammon offered a similar argument, adding that their

desert soil was not deficient in gems or gold, nor themselves in skill from which to raise magnificence. Loud applause greeted this proposal, for the hosts were inclined to peace; the thunder and sword of Michael still wrought within them, and they dreaded another field worse than hell. When Beëlzebub perceived this, he rose,

And in his rising seem'd  
A pillar of state; deep on his front ingraven  
Deliberation sat, and public care;  
And princely counsel in his face yet shone  
Majestic, though in ruin.

His look drew the attention of the multitude, and they remained as still as night, or the air of a summer's noon. He discouraged the lazy argument of peace; but without suggesting any desperate conflict, proposed an easier enterprise against the newly created world and man, where some advantage, either by onset or by guile, might be gained over the favored offspring of heaven. The infernal powers highly exulted at the bold design, and joy sparkled in their eyes as they voted their full assent. All looked astonished, and pondered deeply by whom the perilous attempt should be undertaken. Satan, with unmoved dignity, pointed out the dangers of the design, offered to encounter them, and desired his mighty powers to intend at home whatever might render hell more tolerable, while he abroad, through the courts of destruction, with none to partake his enterprise, sought deliverance for them all. Thus ended the council, and the hosts dispersed, while

Satan winged his way to the gates of hell, before which, guarding the portals, sat Sin and Death. Satan promises to both dominion in the earth, at which they favored his departure,

And Death  
Grinn'd horribly a ghastly smile, to hear  
His famine should be fill'd.

They drew up the huge portcullis and set wide the infernal doors, at whose feet yawned the illimitable ocean of chaos. The wary fiend standing on the brink of hell looked awhile into the abyss, pondering his voyage, while loud and ruinous noises pealed in his ears. At last he spread his wings, and after a slight ascent, met with a void space where his pinions fluttered in vain, and he dropped down ten thousand fathoms, until a cloud hurried him as many miles aloft, and wading half on foot and half flying through a boggy syrtis, he reached the throne of chaos and communed with the old anarch—then springing up like a pyramid of fire through the shock of fighting elements, he moved on with difficulty and labor until he reached the glimmering dawn of light on the last verge of nature, and there weighing his spread wings he paused to behold at leisure the far off heaven, once his habitation, adorned with opal towers and battlements of living sapphire, from which by a golden chain hung the world, small as a little star close by the moon, and thither in proud malevolence he bent his inauspicious way.

The progress of Satan was tracked by the Almighty power, who foretold the success of his purpose and revealed the mystery of human redemption, at which the multitude of angels, with a shout loud and sweet as from blest voices uttering joy, sang loud hosannahs, bent in adoration before the throne, and cast down their crowns interwoven of amaranth and gold, until the bright pavement shone like a sea of jasper empurpled with celestial roses. In the mean time Satan alighted on the bare convex of the world's outermost orb, and walked up and down in gloomy solitude, intent on his prey, until at last a gleam of light attracted his attention, and he descried afar off a high structure of stairs, at the top of which appeared a palace gate embellished with diamond and gold, while beneath flowed a bright sea of liquid pearl. From thence he looked down with wonder on the sudden view of the earth, and winding his oblique way amongst innumerable stars, threw his precipitate flight downwards into the first region of the system. Above all the sun allured him; there he alighted and saw the glorious angel Uriel, on whose head was a golden tiar of sunbeams, while his locks waved over his shoulders fledged with wings. Satan then assumed the guise of a stripling cherub, and having accosted the archangel in hypocritical accents, at length landed on the earth upon the summit of Mount Niphates. There, while in sight of paradise, he was filled with doubts and misgivings; but he overleaped the walls of Eden, and, like a cormorant, sat upon the tree of life, which overtopped the rest, and viewed the scene around him.

And there burst upon his sight crisped brooks rolling over pearls and sands of gold, amidst flowers profusely poured over hill and dale, and groves whose rich trees wept odorous gums and balms ; and he saw the vine creep with its purple grapes over the shady cavern, and listened to the mingled minstrelsy of rivulets and birds. And before him stood the parents of mankind in their unpretending majesty, amidst beasts, unconscious of the savage passions of their after life, which sported innocently, the lion playing with the kid, and the bear and panther gambolling together. Satan marvelled much at the excellent form and happy state of man, but relented not in his purpose. He metamorphosed himself into the image of a beast, and lingered round and listened to the words of Adam and Eve, who, with the warmth of mutual affection and natural piety discoursed of the happiness of their simple existence, and of the tree of knowledge whose fruit was forbidden to their taste. Satan turned away for envy, and eyed them askance, but he discovered in what manner to direct his temptation. He left them ; and Uriel,

Gliding through the even,  
On a sun beam, swift as a shooting star,

hastened to Gabriel, who sat upon a rock of alabaster piled to the clouds, while round him was celestial armory flaming with diamond and gold. Uriel warned Gabriel that an evil spirit had escaped the deep, and passed by

his sphere at noon down to paradise, in the form of a good angel. Night fell, and Adam and Eve, having poured forth their songs of pure devotion, sank into slumber within their bower,

A place

Chosen by the sovran Planter, when he fram'd  
 All things to Man's delightful use; the roof  
 Of thickest covert was inwoven shade  
 Laurel and myrtle, and what higher grew  
 Of firm and fragrant leaf; on either side  
 Acanthus, and each odorous bushy shrub  
 Fenc'd up the verdant wall; each beauteous flower,  
 Iris all hues, roses, and jessamin,  
 Rear'd high their flourished heads between, and wrought  
 Mosses; underfoot the violet,  
 Crocus, and hyacinth, with rich inlay  
 Broider'd the ground, more colour'd than with stone  
 Of costliest emblem: other creatures here,  
 Beast, bird, insect, or worm, durst enter none;  
 Such was their awe of Man. In shadier bower  
 More sacred and sequester'd, though but feign'd,  
 Pan or Sylvanus never slept, nor Nymph,  
 Nor Faunus haunted.

Gabriel disposed his myriads of bright spirits to discover the enemy, and particularly deputed Ithuriel and Zephon with winged speed to search through paradise and protect the slumberers. They found Satan at the ear of Eve, inspiring deceitful dreams, and Ithuriel lightly touched him with his spear. The fiend in his natural shape started up, and the two angels, half amazed so suddenly to behold the grisly king, stepped back. But they brought him before Gabriel, and the fiend with stern

frowns confronted the archangel and threatened vengeance; but the phalanx of spirits hemmed him round with pointed spears.

Satan alarm'd,  
Collecting all his might, dilated stood,  
Like Teneriffe or Atlas unremov'd;  
His stature reach'd the sky, and on his crest  
Sat horror plum'd; nor wanted in his grasp  
What seem'd both spear and shield—

and with haughty murmurs he fled from the holy presence.

When morning dawned Eve related to Adam the terrors of her dream, and they went forth to begin the day, hymning their grateful praises with prompt eloquence more tuneable than lute or harp. Raphael was dispatched from heaven to warn them of their danger. He came, entered into their bower and discovered his purpose, narrated the late revolt in heaven, the conflicts of the angels, and the final overthrow of the spirits of darkness. He revealed the mysterious creation of the world, but with doubtful answer replied to Adam when he sought to enquire into the secrets of the celestial realms. Adam, unwilling that Raphael should depart, detained him with an artless narration of his own birth, and the thoughts and happy sensations that had beguiled him since he was first filled with life. The angel then departed; and Satan, who had compassed the earth and ridden with darkness—being cautious of day since Uriel had despaired

his presence—returned by stealth, and, hid in a mist, again entered Eden, and took upon him the guise of a serpent. Adam and Eve roamed through Paradise, each alone; and the tempter, seizing his opportunity, beguiled the woman, and she ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree, and offered to her lord; and he, in the madness of his affection, resolving rather to perish with her than to lose her, ate too, and the heritage of sin and shame fell on them like a pestilence.

When the transgression of man was known, the angels forsook Paradise, the ghostly phantoms of Sin and Death left their gloomy stations at the gates of hell, to claim the dominion of the world, and the obscure and uncertain way which Satan had traversed from his fearful realms was rendered sure and plain, a way which thereafter was to be worn by the feet of millions. The Tempter returned to his subject spirits; but the lause he expected died upon their lips, and the hisses of a snaky tribe fell discordantly on his ear. The noble proportions of *his* limbs too dissolved away into the sinuous and slimy folds of a serpent. Then ascended the repentant prayers of the first mortals, but their doom was decided, the scheme of human redemption was foretold, and the events of future days thronged before them in a vision; but they were driven from the home of their creation, the bright portals were closed, and the flaming brand and the mighty cherubim guarded the walls of Paradise. As they departed,

Some natural tears they dropp'd, but wip'd them soon ;  
The world was all before them, where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide :  
They, hand in hand, with wand'ring steps and slow,  
Through Eden took their solitary way.

Such is the uninterrupted outline of this great and noble poem ; but it is also interspersed with narrations and episodes, which form a considerable part without mainly tending to the catastrophe of the epic. It has always appeared to me the great fault of *Paradise Lost*—if in such a glorious whole we may not justly suffer ourselves to be too dazzled by its united effect to analyze the construction of its parts—that the episodes are too remote from the events celebrated in the poem, and not sufficiently incidental to its catastrophe ; so that the continuity of the action is broken, and the reader's train of thought somewhat destroyed. That poem is probably the most perfectly constructed which carries us on from the beginning to the end, while we gather new and fervent interest as we proceed, and are rapt in the contemplation of the magnificent and successively developed images that throng before us in unbroken array, and hasten towards their consummation, like a full and rapid river, which, notwithstanding the windings of its course, rushes uniformly onwards to the great ocean. But the digressions in *Paradise Lost* are streams that branch from, rather than flow into the tide of the story ; and although deep and grand in themselves, they do not add to the waters of the

main channel, but rather diminish their volume before they reach their destiny.\*

The longest of these narrations is Raphael's, who relates to Adam the stormy warfare of Satan prior to his fall, when he assembled before the palace of the great Lucifer

An host,  
Innumerable as the stars of night,  
Or (stars of morning) dewdrops, which the sun  
Impearls on every leaf and every flower—

and inspired them to revolt; but Michael and Gabriel led against them the legions of heaven, and the peals of doubtful warfare resounded through the empyrean heights, and the chance of battle wavered, until the Messiah routed the proud enemies of the Omnipotent, and hurled them into the bottomless pit, while eternal wrath burned after them, and Chaos felt tensfold confusion through his wild anarchy.

Satan's character stands alone amongst poetical creations. It is a defined but mysterious conception, massive, yet of the world of spirits, burning with the heat of lofty passions, yet calm in its pride. It has sufficient human sympathies to command our interest, it has sufficient spiritual attributes to lift it far above the level of

\* See note at the end of the volume.

humanity, its features are marked and bold, but they are features that mortal eye cannot scan undazzled. It is a mind of awful grasp racked by its own restlessness, with ambition too vehement for fear, too excited for inactivity, too powerful for despair, with a confidence that cannot quail, a spirit that, if it cannot hope, has never trembled. It is not a personification of mere pride—pride with all its haughty coldness—but of the passions of a noble nature, that have brooded and burned and expanded from their own intensity; and the ruins of what was holy in its origin are grand and gloomy in its decay. The conception of a character naturally evil was one of easy apprehension, the conception of one rendered corrupt by overwrought passion and the too keen sensibility of its nature, was bold and difficult of execution; the former would be but a disgusting personation of vice, the latter a terrible example of the power of moral guilt: the one would have too much grotesque hideousness to attract the grossest, the other might win its dominion over the affections of men, rouse them into morbid vehemence, and overcome even the callous by the cool sternness of its looks, covering a fevered bosom, like the incrustment on lava. We are lost in the contemplation of the towering majesty of the leader of the rebel spirits. The picture of passion is too deep and true to be either overcolored or exaggerated, it is concentrated not distorted. The being is too lofty to dwell among the creatures with whom he communes, but too wily and wise to despise their empire. He has shape, and form, and majesty, he has

the essence of all he was in his purity, debased but not destroyed, yet although he have visible features and members he is still incomprehensible, though indeed with imperial stature, there is a misty medium between man and him. He is too shadowy to make the earth his only habitation, but he towers in solemn grandeur, like a mountainous mass of purple cloud, that looks dark and solid yet is not a thing of substance, and though the sunbeams play around it and gild its silent folds, they cannot dissipate its shade, nor pierce the frowning gloom upon which they smile.

The spirits of Dante are elevations of human nature, beings with some predominant passion distinctly individualized ; those of Milton are ethereal, and of purely celestial existence, they ride upon the wings of seraphs, they have the shape and attributes of glorious angels, and their forms, like their souls, speak of their bright birthplace. Through the whole range of his spiritual characters there is not one that could degenerate into mortal ; from the grim and terrible shapes that guarded the infernal doors, to the delicate Uriel gliding on his sunbeam—from Moloch, smeared with the blood of human sacrifice, to Raphael, who stood like Maia's son, and as he shook his plumes filled the air with fragrance.

If we descend to the mortal heroes of the poem, there is much to sustain the sublime impression we had previously received, in the simple dignities and pure

natures of the parents of the world. On them, and the Paradise they inhabited, the poet has lavished his most florid verse; Eden again blooms before us, and man is free from taint and deformity.

His fair large front, and eye sublime, declar'd  
Absolute rule; and hyacinthine locks  
Bound from his parted forelock manly hung  
Clust'ring, but not beneath his shoulders broad :  
She, as a veil, down to the slender waist  
Her unadorned golden tresses wore,  
Dishevell'd, but in wanton ringlets wav'd,  
As the vine curls her tendrils, which implied  
Subjection, but requir'd with gentle sway,  
And by her yielded, by him best receiv'd;  
Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,  
And sweet, reluctant, amorous delay.

I will not enter at length into the debateable ground of the merits of *Paradise Regained*, nor expatiate upon the injudicious contrast that has been so frequently drawn to its disparagement between that poem and *Paradise Lost*. The latter opened a wide and untrodden sphere, and to a mind that could soar beyond the clouds, and discourse of the vast intellects and angelic multitudes that inhabit the realms of space, presented a full and noble subject, to which there was no limit but the imagination of the poet. In *Paradise Regained* there was less scope for the creative powers. It is grand, it is lofty, it is full of rich poetry and fine pathos; but it wants the unbounded expanse, the massive *chiaro scuro*, the breadth and the character of *Paradise Lost*. It was no degradation of the lofty mind that conceived the one to pen the other, and if when placed

together the one appear less masculine in feature, it is only by comparison; but who could compare the expressive dignity of the Apollo with the broad muscle and sinew of the Farnese Hercules! The Paradise Regained has been damaged only by the connection in which it has been placed, until it is almost necessary to speak with an apology of a poem that has never been equalled by any but its author. That it should have found especial favor from Milton was natural from his fervor and zeal, and the labor and polish with which the work was wrought; but it was worthy both of that labor and that esteem, and will remain fresh and sublime as long as our language and literature, or even our common faith shall endure. I will not attempt a hurried analysis of the poem, which would fail to give an idea of its singular beauties; but there are many parts of such loftiness and truth, that there is little difficulty in selecting an extract which will exhibit the style and construction of the verse. "Look" exclaims the Tempter, as he directs the gaze of the Messiah to the temples and schools of Athens,

Look once more, 'ere we leave this specular mount,  
 Westward, much nearer by south-west, behold  
 Where on the *Æ*gean shore a city stands,  
 Built nobly, pure the air, and light the soil,  
 Athens, the eye of Greece, mother of arts  
 And eloquence, native to famous wits,  
 Or hospitable, in her sweet recess,  
 City or suburban, studious walks and shades;  
 See there the olive grove of Academe,  
 Plato's retirement, where the Attic bird

Trills her thick-warbled notes the summer long ;  
 There, flowery hill, Hymettus with the sound  
 Of bees' industrious murmur oft invites  
 To studious musing ; there Ilissus rolls  
 His whisp'ring stream : within the walls then view  
 The schools of ancient sages ; his who bred  
 Great Alexander to subdue the world,  
 Lyceum there, and painted Stoa next :  
 There shalt thou hear and learn the secret power  
 Of harmony in tones and numbers, hit  
 By voice or hand, and various-measur'd verse,  
 Æolian charms, and Dorian lyric odes,  
 And his who gave them breath, but higher sung  
 Blind Melesigenes, thence Homer call'd,  
 Whose poem Phœbus challeng'd for his own.  
 Thence what the lofty grave tragedians taught  
 In chorus or iambic, teachers best  
 Of moral prudence, with delight receiv'd  
 In brief sententious precepts, while they treat  
 Of fate, and chance, and change in human life ;  
 High actions, and high passions best describing :  
 Thence to the famous orators repair,  
 Those ancients, whose resistless eloquence  
 Wielded at will that fierce democracie,  
 Shook th' arsenal, and fulmin'd over Greece,  
 To Macedon and Artaxerxes' throne.

The drama of Samson Agonistes is not the most successful of Milton's poems. The great effort in dramatic writing is to separate all idea of the author from his work, to make every character stand out in bold relief — no mere transcript of the poet's feelings, no mere oracle of his reflections, but a being separate and distinct from all who surround him, whose discourse should be confined to the incidents of the poem as they arise, and should spring, as it were, consequent upon the event to

it relates. Milton did not possess this individual-power, we trace the author speaking through his characters, prompting, elevating, and rendering them passive rather than active. Their words have a studied ty, their thoughts a diffuseness which in narrative would be effective, but in tragedy destroys the terse ssion of passion, and stands in the way of nature. idea of Samson in his blindness and captivity, the of his enemies, brought forth from his prison on a ll to amuse the people, with the feats of his prowess, the moaning indignation of his oppressed mind when nsiders his helpless situation, aggravated by the unkindness of his wife, are well conceived, and is a solemn and austere dignity throughout the relieved by the wild and irregular lyrics of the s.

**Samson laments,**

O loss of sight, of thee I most complain!  
 Blind among enemies, O worse than chains,  
 Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age!  
 Light, the prime work of God, to me is extinct,  
 And all her various objects of delight  
 Annul'd. \* \* \*

O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,  
 Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse,  
 Without all hope of day!

O first created beam, and thou great word,  
 Let there be light, and light was over all;  
 Why am I thus bereav'd thy prime decree?

The sun to me is dark  
 And silent as the moon,  
 When she deserts the night,  
 Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.  
 Since light so necessary is to life,

And almost life itself, if it be true  
That light is in the soul,  
She all in every part; why was the sight  
To such a tender ball as th' eye confin'd,  
So obvious and so easy to be quench'd?  
And not, as feeling, through all parts diffus'd,  
That she might look at will through every pore?  
Then had I not been thus exil'd from light,  
As in the land of darkness yet in light,  
To live a life half dead, a living death,  
And buried: but O yet more miserable!  
Myself my sepulchre, a moving grave,  
Buried, yet not exempt,  
By privilege of death and burial,  
From worst of other evils, pains, and wrongs,  
But made hereby obnoxious more  
To all the miseries of life,  
Life in captivity  
Among inhuman foes.

It is in the minor poems of Milton that we trace still more distinctly the personal feeling of the poet, and the influence of his times. He loved verse as the expression of his natural impulse, and whatever excited his interest he imprinted in poetry. If his lines were occasionally as rugged as his subject, they had likewise its boldness; they spake the language of a vigorous and original mind, and their images stood out like the sharp and firm outline of a cliff against the blue sky. The sonnet on his blindness breathes of his calm and patient fortitude, those to Cromwell and Fairfax of his honest and unbought admiration, that on the massacre in Piedmont is a fit offering of zeal to the spirits of indignant martyrs :

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter'd saints, whose bones  
 Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold;  
 Ev'n them who kept thy truth so pure of old,  
 When all our fathers worshipp'd stocks and stones,  
 Forget not; in thy book record their groans  
 Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold  
 Slain by the bloody Piemontese, that roll'd  
 Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans  
 The vales redoubl'd to the hills, and they  
 To Heav'n. Their martyr'd blood and ashes sow  
 O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway  
 The triple Tyrant; that from these may grow  
 A hundred fold, who, having learn'd thy way,  
 Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

In tender contrast to these are the delicate and chaste outbreaks of his more homely sensibilities. His beautiful sonnets to the nightingale, to a virtuous young lady, to the religious memory of Mrs. Thompson, and on his deceased wife, his lines on a fair infant dying of a cough, and the tripping and joyous song upon a May morning, that teems with the restless life and sparkling buoyancy of spring, and is musical as the lark at heaven's gate :

Now the bright morning star, day's harbinger,  
 Comes dancing from the East, and leads with her  
 The flow'ry May, who from her green lap throws  
 The yellow cowslip, and the pale primrose.  
 Hail bounteous May! that dost inspire  
 Mirth, and youth, and warm desire;  
 Woods and groves are of thy dressing,  
 Hill and dale doth boast thy blessing.  
 Thus we salute thee with our early song,  
 And welcome thee, and wish thee long.

We have glanced at the English poems of Milton—

with his prose writings, and his Latin and Italian poems, all full of liberty and learning, we have not now to do. On his private life, excepting through those glimpses which we catch of it from his works, or which are necessary to appreciate them, we have but faintly touched, but we have made his English poems his monumental record, and traced the man through these his undying productions; yet he lived an example for mortals, and there is no need to draw a veil over the incidents of his existence. His learning was vast and deep, his imagination soaring and masculine, his judgment solid and profound, his integrity spotless, his affections warm and sure, his zeal firm and faithful. His mind was severely disciplined, he loved truth for her own sake, and forsook her not in the time of trial and temptation. In peril and adversity he remained still at his post unflinching and determined. With keen sensibility he had resolute self command, with warm passions he had strong moral power, with the susceptibility of a delicate spirit he had the nervous courage of a hero. He desponded not in affliction, and the weight of years and sorrows could not overcome his soul; but he sank grey and venerable to the grave, and bequeathed to posterity the productions of his genius and the ensample of his life—and both have well stood the test of time, and passed unscathed through the fiery ordeal of fierce and cavilling comment. In our institutions we now recognize the success of the principles he advocated, and boast as our best bulwark the privileges he helped to purchase. In our social condition we feel

the influence of his stern morality, and render homage to the broad and unwavering light of his constant integrity. In our studies, the grandeur and state of his imagination lift us from the poverty of earth to the colossal regions where all, even passion, is sublime ; and we gaze on him, like a traveller on those huge piles of antiquity that rise from the desert, old, majestic, and eternal, and point their unshaken summits to that heaven which has looked upon them for ages. Such indeed was Milton—he needs no panegyric, his fame is still fresh in our memories ; and it is a proud pleasure, amidst the stormy and violent times when the elements were in convulsion and society rocked around him, to trace him still intrepid, faithful and uncompromising, directing with steady and unreluctant hand his sure and straightforward course, and leaving the measureless results of his upright zeal and boundless intelligence as a heritage to mankind.

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## **NOTES.**

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## NOTES.

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### NOTE I.—PAGE 12.

“ In the year 938 Anlaff, a pagan king of the Hibernians and the adjacent isles, invited by Constantine king of the Scots, entered the river Abi or Humber with a strong fleet. Our Saxon king Athelstan, and his brother Eadmund Clito [Ætheling], met them with a numerous army, near a place called Brunenburgh; and after a most obstinate and bloody resistance, drove them back to their ships. The battle lasted from day-break till the evening. On the side of Anlaff were slain five petty kings, and seven chiefs or generals.” *Warton’s Dissertation on the Origin of Romantic Fiction in Europe.*

It is worthy of remark that on the evening previous to this battle Anlaff, after the example of King Alfred, obtained admittance into the camp of the Saxons, and into the presence of Athelstan, disguised as a minstrel. He was however recognised, previously to his departure, by a soldier who had once fought beneath his banners, but the man had too much magnanimity to betray his former general.

The following version of the ode is from the Saxon, and not from the Latin of Gibson, from which Warton appears to have followed in his prose translation. The poem has frequently been rendered into English, and the author should apologize to his readers for laying before them his own imperfect paraphrase.

King Athelstan, the glory  
Of his leaders brave and bold,

Who gave unto his barons  
     Bracelets of yellow gold,  
 And his brother the Prince Edmund,  
     A chief of warlike might,  
 With the sword's sharp edge, at Brunenburgh,  
     Struck the enemy in fight ;  
 The children of King Edward,  
     With the hammer-beaten blade,  
 Clove down the walls of mighty shields,  
     And low the banners laid.  
 They inherited their valour  
     From a long and noble race,  
 That valour which had oft preserv'd,  
     In ev'ry battle place,  
 Their country, home, and hoards, and crush'd  
     The foe before their face.  
 The fated Scottish armies,  
     And the mariners lay dead,  
 While the battle field resounded,  
     With the blood of warriors red,  
 Since first the sun rose up  
     At morning in the sky,  
 Until the mighty planet,  
     The lamp of the Most High,  
 The lamp of the Eternal Lord,  
     To rest sank drowsily.\*  
 And many northern warriors  
     Were stretch'd upon the field,  
 Strewn with a crowd of winged darts,  
     Shot o'er the shelt'ring shield ;  
 And by them lay the Scotchmen,  
     Weary of war's array.  
 But the Saxons, in battalions,  
     Came forth the livelong day,  
 And press'd upon the footsteps  
     Of the enemy abhor'd,

\* Literally—The field resounded with the blood of warriors since the sun rose up at morning, while the mighty planet, the bright candle of God, or the Eternal Lord, glided over the grounds, until the noble creature sank to her natal bed.

And hewed them downwards, as they fled,  
 With the mill-sharpen'd sword.  
 The Mercians they refus'd not  
 The rough game of the hand  
 To those who with King Anlaf came,  
 To seek our native land,  
 In the bosom of their bounding ship,  
 Across the ocean tide,  
 And hurried to the fatal strife,  
 Where they were doom'd—and died.  
 Five young and noble kings  
 On the battle field were lain,  
 In the gloomy sleep of mighty death,  
 By the swords of warriors slain;  
 And with them slumber'd seven earls,  
 Of Anlaf's proud array,  
 And countless mariners and Scots  
 Died in the desp'rate fray.  
 The leader of the Northmen  
 Was chas'd away and flew,  
 Compell'd to seek his winged ship,  
 With his remaining few;  
 The crowded vessel drove afloat,  
 While rushing from the strife,  
 And wading through the fallow flood,  
 The king preserv'd his life.  
 The hoary chief King Constantine,  
 The valiant and the wise,  
 Fled homewards to his native North,  
 Fled from his enemies.  
 He had no need to boast  
 In the war of sword and shield,  
 His kindred and his friends lay dead  
 On the crowded battle field.  
 He left his son but young in war,  
 Mangled with many a wound,  
 All lifeless amidst heaps of dead,  
 Upon the ruddy ground.  
 He needed not to boast,  
 Whose locks were ting'd with gray,

Of all his bootless stratagems  
     In that sword-clashing fray.  
 Nor either had King Anlaf,  
     With the relic of his host,  
 When he saw the few around him,  
     A better cause to boast  
 That his followers on the battle field  
     At warlike deeds were best,  
 At the conflict of the banners,  
     When spear to spear was press'd ;  
 When the men of arms assembled,  
     At the interchange of blows,  
 And he met King Edward's children  
     On the slaughter field as foes.  
 The Northmen who escaped  
     The arrow's gory rain,  
 Departed in their nail-bound ships,  
     Upon the stormy main,  
 Over the deep blue water,  
     With bosoms fill'd with shame,  
 To the lonely shores of Ireland,  
     And to Dublin whence they came.  
 The brothers then together,  
     The king and prince, return'd  
 To their own West-Saxon homes, the while  
     Their hearts exultant burn'd.  
 They left behind the sallowy kite,  
     The raven swarth and dread,  
 With its horned beak, and the dusky hawk,  
     To prey upon the dead ;  
 They left the white back'd eagle,  
     And the greedy war-hawk there,  
 And that gray beast the wolf of the wold,  
     The vanquish'd dead to tear.  
 Never on this island yet  
     So many mortals fell  
 By the sword's edge since that old time  
     Of which historians tell,  
 When hither from the eastward came  
     The Anglo-Saxon host,

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Across the broad and brimming seas,  
 To Britain's hoary coast;  
 And overthrew the Welch who forge  
 Strong armour for the fray.  
 And they slew their earls exceeding brave,  
 And o'er their land had sway.

## NOTE II.—PAGE 20.

The marriage ceremony on the union of John of Gaunt with the Countess Blanche was performed in the Abbey Church, at Reading, on the 19th of May, 1359. The following lines from Chaucer's Dream are supposed to describe a grand festival held on the occasion in the King's Meadow, which lies under the northern wall of the Abbey and slopes gradually towards the Thames, from the opposite banks of which rise the Oxfordshire hills. It may be observed that the word 'well' in the fifth line is supposed to mean a spring or running stream :

And the fest hold was in tentis,  
 As to tell you mine entent is,  
 In a rome in a large plaine,  
 Undir a wode in a champaine,  
 Betwixt a rivir and a well,  
 Where nevir had abbay ne sell  
 Yben, ne kirke, house, ne village,  
 In time of any man's age,  
 And durid thre moniths the fest,  
 In one estate, and nevir cest  
 From erly rising of the sonne  
 Till the day spent was and yronne  
 In justing, dauncing, lustinesse,  
 And all that sowned to gentilnesse.

At the sacrament the archbishop and archdeacons 'sung full out the service,' and (to quote a local authority) "if we consider the splendour of Edward's court, attended by his five sons then in the flower of their

youth, the king of France his prisoner, and all the principal nobles of the land, together with the tilts and tournaments that were every day exhibited, as well as the number of the tents and variety of banners displayed on this occasion, we may conclude this to have been one of the most pleasing and picturesque sights ever beheld."—*Mann's History of Reading.*

Some gray ruins are all that remain of the Abbey where parliaments were held and bishops consecrated, and the line of a railway is traced across the plain which was the scene of festivity.

NOTE III.—PAGE 23.

In many of these legends there is a fancy which approaches to poetry, and the marvels they relate are not merely grotesque and naked improbabilities. I have annexed an extract from the voyage of St. Brandon and his companions, printed by Wynkyn de Worde in 1498.

Our early poets appear to have delighted much in the music of the warblers of the woods, and the chronicler, in his quaint prose, has caught the spirit of his brethren of the lyre.

" Soon after, as God would, they saw a fair island full of flowers, herbs, and trees, whereof they thanked God of his good grace : and anon, they went on land, and when they had gone long in this, they found a full fair well, and thereby stood a fair tree full of boughs ; and on every bough sat a fair bird ; and they sat so thick on the tree, that unneth any leaf of the tree might be seen. The number of them was so great, and they sang so merrily, that it was an heavenly noise to hear ; wherefore Saint Brandon kneeled down on his knees and wept for joy, and made his prayers devoutly to our Lord God, to know what this birds meant. And then, anon ; one of

the birds fled from the tree to Saint Brandon ; and he, with flickering of his wings, made a full merry noise like a fiddle, that him seemed he never heard so joyful a melody. And then Saint Brandon commanded the bird to tell him the cause why they sat so thick on the tree, and sang so merrily. And then the bird said, Sometime we were angels in heaven ; but when our Master Lucifer fell down in to hell for his high pride, and we fell with him for our offences ; some higher and some lower, after the quality of the trespass. And by cause our trespass is but little, therefore our Lord hath sent us here, out of all pain, in full great joy and mirth, after his pleasing, here to serve him on this tree, in the best manner we can. The Sunday is a day of rest from all worldly occupation ; and therefore that day all we be made as white as any snow, for to praise our Lord in the best wise we may. And then all the birds began to sing even-song so merrily, that it was an heavenly noise to hear ; and after supper, Saint Brandon and his fellows went to bed and slept well ; and on the morn they arose by times, and then those birds began matins, pryme, and hours, and all such service as Christian men used to sing. And Saint Brandon with his fellows abode there viii weeks, until Trinity Sunday was passed.\*

In “The Crafte to lyue well and to dye well. Translated out of Frensshe into Englysshe, the xxi daye of Januarie, the yere of our Lord m ccccc.v,”—a work also printed by Wynkyn de Worde — there is a legend founded on a favorite incident of ancient and modern fiction :

“And of the said Joys of paradise, we read such an example of an holy and devout religious that prayed

\* From the “*Legenda Aurea; that is to saye in Englysshe The Golde Legende. Accomplisshed & synysched att Westmynster the viii daye of Janauer the yere of oure lorde Thousande eccc lxxxviii. And in the xiii yere of the reyngne of kyng Henry the vii. By me wynkyn de worde.*”

continually unto god, that it would please him to shew him some sweetness of the joys of paradise. And so as the said holy and devout religious man was one day in oraison [orison], he heard a little bird that sung by him so sweetly, that it was marvel and melody to hear her. And the said religious hearing this little bird sing so sweetly and melodiously, he rose him from the place where he was to make his oraison, and would have taken and catched the said bird by the tail; the which fled away till unto a forest—the which forest was near unto the monastery of the said religious—and set her upon a tree. And the said religious that followed her, rested him under the tree where the said bird was set, for to hearken her sweet and melodious song, that it was so melodious, as it is said. And the said bird, after she had well sung, flew her way; and the said religious returned him to the monastery; and it seemed him truly that he had ne [not] been more than an hour or two under the said tree. And when he was come unto the monastery, he found the gate stopped; and found another gate made upon the other side of the said monastery, and he came for to knock at the said gate. Then the porter demanded him from whence he came—what he was—and what he would? And the said devout religious answered, ‘I rode forth but late from the monastery, and I have not tarried, and I have found all changed here!’ And, incontinent, the porter led him unto the Abbot, and unto him told the case, how the said religious was comen unto the gate, and how he had questioned with him, and how he had told him that it was but late that he was gone forth, and that he was right soon returned; and that, notwithstanding, he knew no more any thing there. And anon, the Abbot, and the most ancientest of the place, demanded the name of the Abbot that was at the hour that he rode from the said monastery? —and after he named him unto them, they looked in their Chronicles and they found that *he had been absent by the space of iii. C. [three hundred] and three score years!* ‘O soul devout [immediately subjoins the

**author]** If a man have been ccclx year without having cold, ne heat, ne hunger, ne thirst—to hear only one angel of paradise sing,' " &c.

NOTE III.—PAGE 95.

I am aware that my opinions on the subject may be considered heterodox, and that numerous instances and arguments ancient and modern may be cited to prove the legitimate use of episodes and digressions in heroic poetry. There is no doubt that occasionally they are great embellishments, but the only question is what proportion they should bear in length and importance to the entire poem. In the Iliad they are neither very frequent nor very long, and seldom introduced except to illustrate or detail circumstances immediately connected with the action of the epic. Neither the Odyssey nor the *Aeneid* stand alone as entire and complete poems, in the same manner that the Iliad does. They each celebrate the fortunes of one of the leaders in the Trojan war; and Homer first, and then Virgil in imitation of him, found it necessary or interesting to detail the series of events through which his hero passed from his disappearance in the Iliad to his re-appearance either in the Odyssey or *Aeneid*. There was a gap to fill up between the action of the one poem, and the action of the other, and this could only be effected after the manner of Ulysses' narration to Alcinous, or that of *Aeneas* to Dido. In the later ages and in the Italian school episodes and digressions became more frequent, but they tended neither to increase the interest nor add to the power or majesty of the epic. Events seldom appear vividly real when seen not merely through the author's description but through the description of one of his characters; or if they do then rise before us in the actual substance of life, we forget the circumstance of the narration, and are lost to the listening group before whom they are detailed. In the one case therefore the narration is feeble, in the other we are distracted from the immediate action of the poem, and when the tale is told

we return with an effort to the main plot which it has somewhat entangled. I think that this is particularly the case in the Paradise Lost. It begins with the bold and glowing scene of Satan and his angels gasping in the burning lake, and the cause of their discomfited condition is dimly but sufficiently distinctly figured—then comes his journey to the earth, and our introduction to Adam and Eve. As yet the action has progressed, and continues to do so until the angel Raphael commences his narration; when we are suddenly transported to the time of Satan's first defection, and a great part of the poem is occupied by an account of the series of events that occurred from that time until the period of man's creation, about which era the epic commenced. There is this further disadvantage in the arrangement, that in the first book we are informed of the event of the combat between the powers of light and darkness, and apart from the inequality of the strife, are previously acquainted with its issue. I would test the general truth of these observations by the different degrees of interest excited by the earlier and latter books of Paradise Lost. The poetry throughout is inimitably fine; but the attention, which was spell-bound in the commencement, becomes gradually languid as we approach the conclusion of the work.

Milton does not appear to have been particularly happy in the arrangement of a plot, and to this circumstance chiefly his ill success in dramatic writing may be attributed. It is of very little importance to say that a poem is written according to rules, if a better effect might have been produced by a laxer regardance of them; and I am not sure that the Paradise Lost, as a whole, would not produce a stronger impression if it represented a continuous series of actions, and were less entangled with narrations of prior and prophecies of future events.

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INGALL. PRINTER, READING.

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J.L.









